



Washington, DC April 20, 2026

To:

The Honorable Marco Rubio
US Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Subject: Urgent Call for U.S. Leadership to Protect Banyamulenge and Tutsi Civilians in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We, the members of ISÔKO_USA and the Mahoro Peace Association (MPA)—U.S.-based nonprofit organizations representing American citizens and residents of Banyamulenge and Tutsi heritage—write in connection with our peaceful protest in Washington, D.C., on April 20, 2026. We respectfully urge immediate and coordinated action by the United States to address the escalating violence and humanitarian crisis affecting Banyamulenge and Tutsi civilians in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

For many in our communities, this crisis is deeply personal. As survivors or descendants of past persecution who were rescued by the US since 2000, we remain profoundly concerned about the safety of our families and loved ones in the region. The scale and pattern of recent attacks demand timely U.S. diplomatic engagement to prevent further loss of life and to support regional stability.

Escalating Violence Against Banyamulenge and Tutsi Civilians

In South Kivu Province, particularly in the Minembwe highlands and surrounding areas, Banyamulenge communities face sustained threats from multiple armed actors, including the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), local “Wazalendo” militias, and elements allied with Burundian armed groups. Credible field reports and eyewitness accounts indicate the involvement of units within the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), operating alongside elements of the Burundi National Defense Force (FDNB) and allied



militias. These operations have had devastating consequences for civilian populations, including the destruction of villages, widespread looting of livestock and economic assets, and significant loss of life. Thousands of civilians have been displaced and now face severe hardship, with limited access to food, healthcare, and necessities.

Recent Developments and Heightened Risks

The situation has worsened in recent months. Reports describe intensified aerial operations, including drone strikes and fighter jet activity, conducted by or in coordination with FARDC and FDNB forces, often with the support of foreign mercenaries. These operations have directly impacted civilian areas in Minembwe and nearby localities, causing damage to homes, schools, markets, grazing lands, and other critical infrastructure.

Compounding these attacks is a humanitarian blockade affecting Banyamulenge communities in the Minembwe highlands and surrounding areas. This blockade restricts freedom of movement, limits the delivery of humanitarian aid, and cuts off access to food, medicine, and essential supplies, placing thousands at risk of starvation and medical crisis.

Disruptions to telecommunications and internet services further isolate affected populations, while restrictions on financial flows, including diaspora remittances, have severed critical lifelines for families under prolonged siege.

Government Responsibility and International Humanitarian Law

The protection of civilians is a fundamental obligation under international humanitarian law. We urge all parties, including the Government of the DRC and its regional partners, to ensure that military operations comply fully with these standards and avoid indiscriminate force or collective punishment. Independent verification of reported incidents and accountability for violations are essential to rebuilding trust and preventing further escalation.

Humanitarian and Regional Implications



The humanitarian toll is severe. The combined effects of violence, aerial operations, and restricted access to aid have led to widespread displacement and increased vulnerability. Many civilians now face insecurity, hunger, and lack of medical care. Without swift intervention, the crisis risks further entrenching armed groups, increasing cross-border tensions, and undermining broader regional stability in the Great Lakes region—an outcome that runs counter to the objectives of the Washington Accords.

Urgent Recommendations for U.S. Action

We respectfully urge the Department of State, under your leadership, to:

- Advocate for addressing the root causes of insecurity and violence affecting Banyamulenge and Tutsi communities through sustained diplomatic engagement.
- Support immediate humanitarian access by promoting the demilitarization of key transit points, including Uvira, and the lifting of the humanitarian blockade to enable safe and sustained aid delivery to Minembwe and surrounding areas.
- Condition U.S. security assistance on full adherence to international humanitarian law by all recipients.
- Call for an immediate end to aerial bombardments and other operations that endanger civilian populations and infrastructure.
- Support impartial international investigations into alleged attacks on civilians, including those involving FARDC, FDNB, and allied forces or associated mercenaries, and promote accountability—potentially through targeted sanctions under authorities such as the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.
- Address disruptions to telecommunications and internet access to ensure civilians can communicate and report emergencies safely.
- Restore and protect civilian financial channels, including remittance flows, to mitigate the effects of the humanitarian blockade.
- Urge the immediate release of civilians detained without due process, including those held at Makala Central Prison and Ndolo Prison.
- Strengthen U.S. diplomatic leadership by reinforcing support for a Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region and bolstering African-led and international mediation efforts toward sustainable peace.



We gather in a spirit of peaceful advocacy and constructive dialogue. Our aim is to amplify the voices of vulnerable communities and encourage decisive U.S. leadership to help prevent further suffering and promote lasting stability for all people in the region.

We stand ready to provide additional information or engage further with the Department of State and members of Congress. Thank you for your attention to this urgent humanitarian and security matter.

Respectfully,

On Behalf of the Congolese Tutsi/Banyamulenge diaspora in the USA

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Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (NY); Rep. Andrew Clyde (GA)
Rep. Joe Morelle (NY); Victoria Spartz (IN)
Sen. Raphael Warnock (GA); Rep. Buddy Carter (GA)
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