



Seattle, WA August 15th, 2025

Honorable Marco Rubio
U.S. Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

- Mr. James E. Risch, U.S. Senator (ID), Chairman, U.S. Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510
- Rep. Brian Mast, Chairman of House Committee on Foreign Affairs.
2170 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515
- All US Senate and House Foreign Relations Committee

Subject: Call for Action to Protect the Tutsi/Banyamulenge Ethnic Group in Eastern D.R. Congo

Dear Honorable Secretary Rubio,

We, the members of ISÔKO_USA and Mahoro Peace Association—U.S.-based nonprofit organizations representing American citizens of Banyamulenge and Tutsi heritage—write to urgently draw your attention to the escalating crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which endangers all populations in the region and threatens the stability of the African Great Lakes.

This month marks the 21st commemoration of the Gatumba Genocide of Banyamulenge on August 13th, 2004, when Rwandan militias—linked to both Congolese and Burundian armed groups—attacked UN refugee camps in Burundi, selectively killing Tutsi/Banyamulenge men, women, and children solely because of their ethnic identity, in atrocities tragically reminiscent of the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

The Gatumba genocide is not an isolated incident, but part of a decades-long campaign of persecution against Tutsi-Banyamulenge dating back to 1996.

In December 1997, massacres such as those at Mudende refugee camp in Western Rwanda was perpetrated by FDLR(then Interahamwe Rwandan militia forces) in collaboration with elements of the Mobutu regime—which claimed more than 300 innocent lives.

Many survivors of these atrocities were rescued by the United States. Beginning in February 2000, under the leadership of then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, approximately 2,500 Congolese Tutsi were resettled across the U.S., where they are now proud citizens. We now call for that same moral leadership to help rescue today's victims of ethnic violence in our homeland.



Despite the July 19th, 2025, Doha Declaration of Principles between M23/AFC and the Congolese government, war persists, especially in South Kivu. Individuals of Tutsi appearance are being stoned, lynched, and, in some cases, cannibalized by mobs incited by hate speech from Congolese officials and state-aligned media. Villages have been burned, hundreds of thousands of cattle—our community’s economic lifeline—have been looted, and thousands have fled to Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, and beyond.

The situation is most dire in Minembwe, South Kivu, where the Tutsi-Banyamulenge population has been placed under a deliberate, government-imposed embargo. For over four months, no food, medicine, or humanitarian aid has been allowed in. Instead, the area is bombarded, with the clear intent that those not killed by bullets or machetes will starve to death. This is a slow-motion atrocity unfolding before the world’s eyes.

For decades—especially since 2017—the Banyamulenge have suffered systematic discrimination and ethnic cleansing at the hands of militias from neighboring ethnic groups (Babembe, Bafuliru, Banyindu) operating in coordination with Burundian armed groups such as Red-Tabara and FNL. Senior officers of the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) have provided moral, logistical, and operational support to these militias, with documented complicity at all levels of government.

In the Banyamulenge highlands, over 450 villages have been destroyed, more than 500,000 cattle stolen, and over 80% of our population forced into exile. Those who remain face harassment, arbitrary arrests, and confinement to ghettos—barred from markets, farmland, and contact with other communities. Over 700 Tutsis are currently detained without trial in Kinshasa and provincial facilities, in direct violation of Congolese and international law.

Even Tutsi and Banyamulenge soldiers have been targeted. On December 9, 2021, Major Joseph Kaminzobe was lynched, burned alive, and cannibalized in public while fellow soldiers looked on. On December 20th, 2021, Lt. Gapasi Munyemanzi was lynched and stoned to death at his office in the suburb of Goma. On November 9, 2023, Lt. Gisore Kabongo Patrick suffered the same fate in Goma just to name the few. Human Rights Watch described these as “blatant acts of hate-motivated violence.” Yet the perpetrators remain free and still spread out the hate speech.

The same patterns of violence have struck Tutsi communities in North Kivu and the Hema people in Ituri, regularly massacred by CODECO militias operating with state complicity. UN genocide prevention experts, including Alice Nderitu, have warned that conditions in the DRC mirror those that have historically led to genocide. Former UN human rights chief Abdoul Aziz Thioye has documented a surge in anti-Tutsi hate speech since mid-2021. Despite repeated alerts, neither the Congolese government nor the international community has acted effectively to protect victims or prosecute offenders.

The European Union has sanctioned individuals such as former minister Justin Bitakwira for inciting violence against Banyamulenge. The UN, U.S., EU, France, Belgium, Germany, the UK,



and Rwanda have all condemned this hate speech. Former South African president Thabo Mbeki has emphasized that resolving the discrimination and exclusion of Banyamulenge and Tutsi is central to achieving lasting peace in the DRC.

We urge the U.S. government, in collaboration with the Senate and House Foreign Relations Committees, to ensure that the DRC government and its armed opponents commit to:

1. **Immediate cessation of hostilities** – End all fighting and bombing, with enforcement by independent monitors.
2. **Inclusive dialogue** – Address the root causes of more than 30 years of conflict through genuine talks between the government and AFC/M23.
3. **Respect for human rights** – Guarantee security, mobility, access to public services, justice, and education for all citizens without discrimination.
4. **Safe return and protection of refugees and displaced persons** – Ensure secured voluntary return of all refugees and displaced in all affected areas in North and South Kivu Provinces and in Ituri Province
5. **To open a humanitarian corridor to Minembwe area** for the supplier of Food, Medication and other basic needs to the endangered population ending all embargoes and blockades.

The United States has historically played a decisive role in preventing mass atrocities. We believe that your leadership can help avert another genocide in the Great Lakes region. Addressing the root causes of this crisis is essential for lasting peace in the DRC and stability across the region.

The Banyamulenge, Tutsi of the DRC, and Hema people seek no special privileges—only the right to live, to be recognized as full citizens, and to exist free from persecution. We respectfully call on you to ensure that U.S. policy prioritizes protection for at-risk communities, holds perpetrators accountable, and pressures the DRC government to end its complicity with extremist militias.

As US-Citizens, the members of our organizations are grateful for granting them an opportunity to have a second chance after being denied their rights for life. We all committed to supporting all efforts initiated by the US-administration to establish a long-standing peace, security and economic stability that will prevent future conflicts with consequences of more refugees seeking to come to the US. Thank you for your time and request a meeting to discuss this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

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President ISÔKO_USA

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