

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
United States Secretary of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington DC

Ms Madelline Vertullo  
Africa Researcher for USCIRF  
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31 August 2022

We, the undersigned, are a group of individuals and organizations that advocate for human rights and religious freedom around the world. We represent diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds but are united in our goal of promoting freedom of religion or belief for all. We are also writing to you to express our concern regarding the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We note with appreciation your trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo on August 10th and 11th. Since the situation in the provinces of Ituri, Nord Kivu and Sud Kivu are on the agenda we seek to raise our concerns with you.

Although often overlooked by other issues occurring in the country, there have been several events that have taken place that raise our concerns. They include:

For the second year in a row, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was recognized by the Norwegian Refugee Council as one of the world's "most neglected displacement and humanitarian crises" for its exacerbating violence in war and armed conflict, rising food insecurity, and expanding religious freedom violations.<sup>1</sup>

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is one of the militias active in the region since 2018, has been directly targeting Christians in the eastern region of the country. On February 2nd of this year at least 50 people seeking shelter in a Church<sup>2</sup> were massacred by the CODECO Militia at Savo, Ituri Province. Moreover, in its most recent report, Open Doors USA<sup>3</sup> placed the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 40th place on its list of the 50 top countries where Christians are currently in fear of persecution. We were equally stunned to learn from the recent UN Panel of Experts report<sup>4</sup> on the situation in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo that that Rwanda has intervened on the side of one of the militias.

We would be doing a disservice to ignore the tensions along the border with Uganda as well. A recent incident involving UN Peacekeepers resulted in the untimely death<sup>5</sup> of an 8 year old girl among other casualties.

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<sup>1</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, "[DR Congo tops list of world's most neglected crises](#)", 27 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, "[DR Congo: At least 50 dead following militia attack on camp](#)", 2 February 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Open Doors USA, [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#).

<sup>4</sup> Reuters, "[U.N. experts say Rwanda has intervened militarily in eastern Congo](#)", 4 August 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Halima Athumani, "[Uganda Monitors DRC Border After Deadly Shooting](#)", *Voice of America*, 1 August 2022.

At the end of July 2022 the Burundian Human Rights Initiative released a report<sup>6</sup> documenting the presence and operations of the Burundian Army against the Militant Group RED-Tabara. Most of this effort has not generated the same media coverage as operations that have been taken against other actors in the region.

In light of these events we as members of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable add our concerns regarding the situation unfolding in the country. We note that the ADF aka ISCAP (Islamic State Central Africa Province) has already been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the State Department more action could be taken.

Realizing that there is an outpouring of comments asking for action against M23, We also urge action such as declaring not only M23, but also CODECO as a Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the State Department. Furthermore, we are urging that USCIRF declare both groups as Entities of Particular Concern for their “engagement in particularly severe violations of religious freedom”.

We also feel that the criteria presented above should be used to determine whether or not the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be determined as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) by both USCIRF and the State Department for these actions.

We thank you for both your visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and consideration regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

### ***Organizations***

*Asian Children’s Education Fellowship*

*Christ’s Mandate for Missions*

*Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience*

*Orthodox Public Affairs Committee (OPAC)*

*Religious Freedom Coalition*

### ***Individuals***

*Bryan Nerren*

*President*

*Asian Children’s Education Fellowship*

*William Murray*

*President*

*Religious Freedom Coalition*

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<sup>6</sup> Africa News, [“Since 2021 Burundi has secretly sent troops to DR Congo – Rights group”](#), 27 July 2022.