

20 October 2008

Dear Honourable Member of Parliament,

As a coalition of international NGOs working on humanitarian, peace and development issues and active in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, we wish to thank the European Parliament for having selected Abbot Apollinaire MALU MALU as one of the final nominees for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. As stated in our letter of 18th September 2008, we strongly believe **awarding the Sakharov Prize to Malu-Malu would not only give well-deserved recognition to his many achievements in promoting democracy and peace in his country, but also bring desperately needed attention to the plight of Congo and its ongoing crisis**, which has been absent for too long from the EU's agenda.

Since the outbreak of fighting in August 1998 more than 5.4 million people have died in the DRC, making it the deadliest conflict since World War II. Since the end of August there has been a significant increase in fighting between armed groups in Eastern DRC and a new humanitarian crisis has broken out. The risks of a new full-blown regional war in the Great Lakes are very high at the moment. Malu-Malu is charged with assuring the implementation of a cease fire agreement, adherence to the commitment to protect civilians and to respect humanitarian and human rights law. Congolese civil society leaders like Malu Malu cannot address all the country's challenges alone. Long-term support and sustained political engagement from the international community are key in order to move the peace process forward and put an end to the conflict that has been devastating the DRC for years.

We recognize the outstanding efforts that the European Parliament already made through the adoption of the resolutions of 17 January and 21 February on the situation in DRC and rape as a war crime and on North Kivu respectively.

In the framework of the discussion gearing up to the final selection of the Sakharov Prize nominee we would like to bring back onto the EP's political agenda some of the recommendations made in those two resolutions. Through our organisations' long-term involvement in DRC and our advocacy work at the EU level we have observed that the Council and the European Commission haven't taken heed of a number of the recommendations made by the European Parliament. **We call on the European Parliament to bring the following recommendations to the fore and use its political power to ensure that necessary action is taken in order to implement them:**

On sexual violence:

- The EP calls on the EU to allocate substantial funds to providing medical, legal and social support for victims of sexual abuse and empowering women and girls as a way of preventing further sexual abuse;

- Calls on the EU to do everything possible to put in place an effective mechanism for the monitoring and documenting of sexual violence in the DRC and to provide efficient and adequate aid and protection for women, particularly in the east of the country;

On MONUC:

- Calls on the Council and the Commission to ensure that the recent strengthening of MONUC leads to a significant improvement in the security of the populations of North Kivu and, to urge the UN Security Council to give MONUC the means to fulfil its mission, beginning with the effective and lasting protection of the civilian populations in the region;

On the situation in Eastern DRC:

- Calls on the Council and the Commission to implement large-scale medical assistance programmes for the civilian populations in Eastern DRC with immediate effect.

On natural resources:

- Calls on the EU to continue its support to the effective establishment of monitoring mechanisms, such as the Kimberley Process and the FLEGT initiative for the certification of the origin of natural resources imported into the EU market in order to stop resource revenues financing violent conflict.

With sincere regards,



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Key questions on the conflict in Eastern DRC

1. Why is it important to intervene in DRC as a matter of urgency?

Renewed combat in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has caused a drastic deterioration in the humanitarian situation and immense suffering for civilians.

Since August 28, 2008, fighting has resumed between the Congolese army and the forces of a renegade general, Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), as well as other armed groups, breaking a fragile ceasefire that had been in place since the Goma peace agreement was signed on January 23. An estimated 100,000 civilians were forced to flee in the most recent violence, including many who had been displaced by earlier waves of fighting. According to witnesses, some civilians were trapped in combat zones and were killed, wounded, raped or illegally detained by soldiers of the Congolese army and combatants of other armed groups. The fighting is the worst since a ceasefire was signed in January this year. If fighting continues, the situation for civilians will get worst still. This is a terrible time for DRC - peace seems ever more elusive. All parties to the Goma agreement need to put down their weapons and come back to the table to negotiate the peace.

2. Isn't Congo's war over and didn't they have elections?

Congo's war officially ended in 2003 but fighting continued, mainly in the country's eastern provinces. In 2006, despite the ongoing violence, Congo held historic elections that for the first time allowed people to vote freely for their leaders. While these elections were an important development for the country, they could not fix all of Congo's problems. Underlying issues such as questions about disarmament of militias, army reform, justice and the illegal exploitation of Congo's mineral wealth have not been resolved and continue to cause difficulties.

Background of the most recent conflict

On January 23 2008, the Congolese government and 22 armed groups signed the Goma peace agreement, committing to an immediate ceasefire and observance of international human rights law. The Goma Agreement followed the November 2007 agreement between the governments of Congo and Rwanda, known as the Nairobi Communiqué, which sought to address the presence of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan armed group, in eastern Congo. In April 2008, the Congolese government set up the Amani Program to coordinate peace efforts in eastern Congo.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement set out the basic rights of all displaced people, though their implementation has been weak in eastern Congo. A

majority of displaced people in North and South Kivu do not have access to adequate health services, food, or education. In some areas, malnutrition rates have reached alarming levels and several diseases are endemic. A worrying increase in cholera cases, for example, has been registered in six health zones in North Kivu since the beginning of September.

Local food prices have increased dramatically, exacerbating poverty and malnutrition, but the World Food Programme has been obliged to reduce rations in eastern Congo because of food shortages. Displaced people and other vulnerable groups have resorted to high-risk strategies to feed their families. Despite the risk of abuses by army soldiers or combatants of armed groups, some have no alternative but to return home to cultivate their fields. Women and girls are the most affected: many have been raped while attempting to return home or to seek firewood or water. Others have been arbitrarily arrested or forced to pay illegal taxes. Those who do manage to reach home often find their houses looted or occupied by armed groups or bandits.

Children of displaced families have little or no access to education, either because the family has no money to pay school fees or because there are no schools operating in or near displacement camps. In the struggle to stay alive, children are forced to work. As one young boy said to a humanitarian worker, "if you don't work, you don't eat". Like women, children are vulnerable and easy prey to attacks by combatants. In areas around Masisi, for example, children go out to collect firewood at 3 a.m. to avoid abuse by militias, being captured for recruitment, or rape.

The vast majority of those forced to flee their homes live with host families, many of whom are as poor as those they support. To date, these host families, many of whom have sheltered large numbers of displaced persons for months or years, have received little attention and assistance. With village populations sometimes doubling in size, scarce local resources are so strained that displaced people are often forced to move again to other locations.