

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu,

"Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak."

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,

"The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:31

Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are two persons revered in the Black community for their faith, courage, wisdom, and strength for challenging systems of prejudice and oppression. We admire them for being the voice of the voiceless. We are often encouraged to model our lives after them. Today, you are challenged to model your lives after them, ***break the silence*** and become a voice to the voiceless.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) the worst humanitarian crisis in the world is unfolding and too many people who benefit from the vast resources of the Congo have no idea. Though the conflict has many government and military groups involved and has a complex history, this much is simple. Over 5.4 million people have been killed in the past ten years; and half of these people are children. During the same time period, over 200,000 women, men, and children have been systematically raped as a weapon of war.

The root cause of the conflict is control over the immense natural resources in the DRC, which are a tremendous blessing. There are huge amounts of diamonds, cobalt, copper, tin ore, coltan (vital to the functioning of our cell phones and other electronic devices), oil, and timber, all key resources for our electronics, aerospace, automobile, military and technology industries. The natural resources make the DRC a prime target for foreign governments, greedy local elites, multi-lateral institutions and international corporate forces that covet Congo's precious and strategic resources.

The violence against civilians must stop and we can all do something to help.

As Christians we are called to be in community with one another, to fellowship with one another, to love one another, and to stand for those who cannot stand for themselves. We are called to pray for and lift up those in need. We come from a rich religious Judeo-Christian heritage that requires that our faith and our conscience to be our guide.

As African Americans and people of faith we are the spiritual children of God and the descendants of enslaved and free Africans. We have a rich history of taking a stand when no one else would even if it led to death. When we look at our history and think of Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Winnie Mandela, Nelson Mandela, and Desmond Tutu we realize we come from people who stood against injustice no matter the personal sacrifice.

The people in Congo, our brothers and sisters, are calling for help again. In the late 1800s, African Americans of faith including William Sheppard, Maria Fearing and Lucy Gantt

responded to the call of the Congolese and travelled to the Congo to assist. We need to continue to carry the mantle in pursuit of liberation, freedom and equality. Our ancestors had no one to stand for them so they took initiative and stood tall for each other. The people of Congo need us to be their voice. We need to answer the call to cry out for justice, freedom and equality and to stand against violence, destruction, prejudice, and death.

We are asking your help in Breaking Silence and standing for a free and liberated Congo. Look for more information in the coming months on how you and your congregation can stay educated, involved, and active in the campaign to end the conflict in the Congo.

Sincerely,

Maurice Carney Gerald LeMelle Rev. Kimberly Barnes
Friends of the Congo, Africa Action, Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church

Jayne Wooten Rev. Carolyn Boyd Emira Woods
Kinetics Faith and Justice Network, Global AIDS Alliance, Institute for Policy Studies

How Can You Help?

Participate in the "Break The Silence" campaign, and join in Congo Week, this year October 17th-24th. www.congoweek.org

Lobby your elected officials: Call the Capitol operator at (202)224-3121 to contact your Representative or Senator. Go to www.house.gov or www.senate.gov to send an email.

Send a letter to President Obama, or Secretary of State Clinton, or your senators and house representatives. Use the sample letter below, or write, or add comments of your own.

Join the working group of African Advocates and African American religious leaders organizing to end the conflict in the Congo through faith based community action. Email: Rev. Kimberly Barnes at revkimberly@metropolitananamec.org or Meryl Zendarski at: internadmin@africaaction.org

Dear _____:

I am writing because as a Christian and an African American, I am deeply concerned about the current crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The people of the Congo are suffering, especially women and children, because of the power struggle to control and profit from the many natural resources in their country.

As Christians we are called to be in community with one another, to fellowship with one another, to love one another, and to stand for those who cannot stand for themselves. It is in this spirit that I am writing to you.

Faced with the deadliest conflict and worst humanitarian crisis in our world today, I believe that it is a moral imperative to act now to end the conflict. Plenty can be done to resolve the crisis. I endorse the following policy prescriptions that can lead to an immediate cessation of the conflict and lasting and durable peace.

The best solution to the conflict is a political solution NOT a military one, embracing strategic U.S. government leadership in diplomatic efforts, and negotiations for peace.

Maximum diplomatic pressure must be brought to bear on U.S. government allies

Rwandan and Uganda to be partners for peace as opposed to the aggressive destructive roles that they have sometimes played in the Congo.

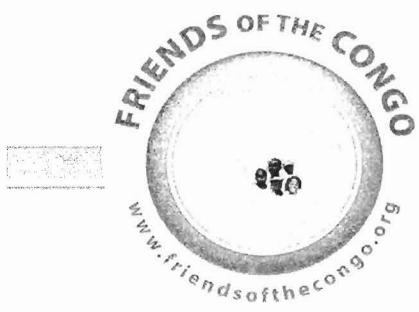
Full support and adequate resources must be provided to the UN peacekeepers on the ground (known as MONUC) in the DRC to ensure: that these courageous peacekeepers are properly trained, and can effectively protect civilians.

Direct support should be given to those Congolese institutions working to restore the social fabric of a people torn apart by a decade-long war.

On behalf of my congregation, and myself I beseech you to use your power and influence to advocate for and END to the conflict and fighting in the Congo. Our nation should be fully engaged diplomatically and embrace a peaceful political solution to the conflict, not a military one. Peace negotiations, and protection of the civilian population must be the foreign policy priorities for the Congo, not securing access to resources and minerals.

Praying for peace in the Congo,

Sincerely,



"WE ARE NOT ALONE. AFRICA, ASIA AND FREE AND FRIEDAN PEOPLE FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE WORLD WILL ALWAYS BE FRIENDS AT THE SIDE OF THE CONGOLESE."

PATRICK EMERY LUMUMBA

TALKING POINTS

1. The source of the conflict in the Congo is a result of the scramble for the Congo's natural wealth, which began in its latest expression in 1885 and continues to this day.
2. Local elites, neighboring countries, multilateral institutions (IMF, World Bank) foreign governments and foreign corporations have established an alliance to pilfer the Congo's wealth at the expense of the Congolese people.
3. Nearly 6 million Congolese have died due to conflict and its affects since 1996. This is the largest number of deaths due to conflict since World War II.
4. In spite of trillions of dollars worth of wealth in Congo's soil, some estimates are as high as \$24 trillion, the average Congolese lives on only \$100 per year.
5. A leadership and organizational crisis exists in the Congo mainly as a result of decades of personal rule by King Leopold II, Belgian Colonization and Mobutu's brutal dictatorship.
6. Congo is endowed with enormous wealth. The Congo River alone has enough hydropower to provide electricity for the entire African continent. Congo's fertile soil has the capacity to feed the entire world through 2050 when the world's population is estimated to reach 9 billion.
7. Congo has the largest reserves of untapped minerals in the world. The country boasts two thirds of the world's reserves of coltan, ten percent of the world's copper, 30 percent of cobalt, vast fresh water reserves, a part of the second largest rainforest behind the Amazon, and is blessed with gold, silver, tin, uranium, timber, oil, gas and many other resources to compliment the country's human potential.
8. Congo is strategically placed in the center of the African continent, bordered by nine countries and is as large as Western Europe with a population of 60 million people, hence the common saying as the Congo goes so does Africa.
9. The Challenge of the Congo is to produce a leadership that will work on behalf of and in the interest of the masses of the Congolese people as opposed to working for personal gain and foreign interests.
10. The proper usage and management of Congo's wealth can serve as an engine for the development of the entire African continent and make Congo a major player among nations in the global arena.