**Contribution to the Round Table Discussion on DRC organised by the standing committee on Foreign Trade and Development Aid of the House of Representatives – Netherlands**

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Illia Djadi, Africa Expert, Open Doors International

Ladies and gentlemen,

Open Doors International supports communities of Christians from all denominations in more than 60 countries where their fundamental rights are violated because of their faith.

We have been engaged in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years through local partners that are working to provide support to Christian communities under threat.

In recent weeks, we have received reports and testimonies, from our local partners – sharing chilling accounts of suffering, atrocities and killings. Their stories are those of sorrow, anger and despair of people crying for help.

Across eastern provinces of the country, people are living in a constant state of fear. Many have been displaced multiple times, fleeing one attack only to be targeted again in another village or town. Over 8 million people are now displaced – internally and externally – making it the second largest humanitarian crisis, after Sudan. While international attention has been focused on conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, the crisis in the DRC has gone largely unnoticed.

Why has this been allowed to happen?

We recognize that there is no easy answer. And there is no single cause to this complex and dramatic situation.

We need first to consider the wider context marked by violence and conflicts due to the presence of numerous armed groups active there, for years. This has been aggravated by the offensive launched by the rebel group M23, in January, which has taking over entire regions in the North and South Kivu provinces.

But while the attention is focused on M23, we observe that this violent advance has left a security vacuum: vast areas of the country - particularly rural/farming communities - have been left completely unprotected. And that is exactly where other non-state actors, like ADF thrives. The Allied Democratic Forces is not just another armed group fighting for power. It is a radical Islamic group which has pledged allegiance to [Islamic State (IS)](https://www.premierchristianity.com/home/who-are-islamic-state-and-what-do-they-want/1394.article) – and ADF is responsible of targeted attacks against innocent people - particularly Christian communities. Their insurgency has already claimed the lives of hundreds of people. Churches have been burned, pastors murdered, and entire communities were forced to flee.

This war is not just a local conflict. The DRC is the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa, and one of the richest nations of the continent, with vast reserves of rare minerals needed for smartphones, laptops and electric vehicles. That wealth has made it a battleground for powerful global interests – including Western and Chinese companies, foreign governments and armed groups who exploit the chaos to profit from the country’s resources.

But we need also to consider other issues. Recent history of the DRC has been one of political instability. This has resulted in a failed governance, widespread corruption – from both civilian and military elites – a failure to provide security which has become a key priority, particularly in eastern provinces of North and South Kivu. We can also mention the issue of impunity: the inability of the justice system to investigate and prosecute those responsible of human rights violations, or economic misconducts.

How to respond to this complex situation?

We recognize that there is no easy solution to this long-running vortex of violence and suffering in the DRC.

But the lives of innocent people in the DRC cannot be treated as collateral damage. The international community must take a decisive role in stopping the violence and finding lasting solutions.

When we consider recent history, we observed that in [2012, M23 waged a similar campaign of violence](https://www.premierchristianity.com/home/we-need-to-talk-about-congo/3259.article), but it was stopped when the US and other international actors put serious pressure on Rwanda to withdraw support. It worked then and it can work again. Governments - including the Netherlands and the EU - must urgently stepped in and call for a decisive action to stop the bloodshed and provide protection for vulnerable communities exposed to violence.

The international community must ensure that people displaced by violence and can safely return back to their homes and businesses - and victims of all serious human rights abuses receive psycho-social care, and have access to justice and humanitarian assistance.

The international community must also promote good governance and rule of law by supporting government’s efforts to restore its authority in Eastern Provinces of North and South Kivu provinces, deeply affected by violence for decades.

The international community and the Government of DRC should acknowledge the specificity of ADF - and its religious agenda – which require tailored responses: for example, to counter extremist propaganda, introduce de-radicalisation programmes for captured members of the group and provide protection for churches or other vulnerable communities.

Lastly, as we reflect on this crisis, please don’t forget the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The latest massacre carried out by ADF militants, took place only last week – two separate attacks on 7 and 10 March - and claimed 17 innocent lives. Many others are still missing. All of them are members of local churches in Lubero Territory of the North Kivu Province.  Last year alone, at least 355 Christians were killed for their faith in eastern DRC - a sharp increase from 261 the previous year. If nothing changes, these numbers will only rise.

One pastor who survived the attack shared this:

“Please help us with your prayers! Finding what to eat has become a problem.

“Please pray for peace to return, because the situation is chaotic”.

Thank you for your attention.