



Re: Your Ambassadorship

Dear Ambassador Tamlyn,

As you prepare to assume your new posting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), we write to extend our hopes and concerns regarding human rights abuses in the country. In serving as U.S. ambassador to the DRC, you have considerable power to champion and move the needle on various causes that define the lives and rights of millions of Congolese. We are aware that you will have many competing priorities as you take up your post from conflict in the East to combatting corruption to climate commitments and looming elections. With this, we firmly urge you to place human rights at the top of your agenda. Alongside grassroots human rights civil society actors, your actions can help ensure the safety and wellbeing of some of the DRC's most vulnerable populations. Outlined below are some of the most pressing human rights priorities to consider in your upcoming work.

Accountability and justice for past and recent serious crimes

In recent months armed conflict in the eastern DRC has escalated with the resurgence of the M23 armed group coupled with renewed tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. Dozens of other armed groups continue to operate in this region of the DRC attacking civilians, while the Congolese armed forces meant to protect civilians are often accused of human rights violations themselves. The national, regional and international response to this nearly 30-year-old conflict remains largely military while its root causes, though well known, receive little or no attention. Among those causes, the widespread impunity enjoyed by the individuals accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the DRC since the 1990s.

The international community, under US leadership, should raise the price for the perpetrators of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations committed in the DRC. Justice for the victims is long overdue, yet without justice all other efforts are at a risk of remaining illusory. **We urge you to use your influence with both the Congolese authorities and within the US Government to take concrete and urgent action to put an end to impunity and bring justice to the victims.**

The State of Siege

A State of Siege, which is similar to a state of emergency, has been enforced in the North Kivu and Ituri provinces by DRC authorities since May 2021 has been used as a tool to crush dissent, with two human rights activists killed by security forces and dozens of activists arbitrarily detained on trumped-up charges. President Tshisekedi declared that he introduced the State of Siege with the aim of combating armed groups and protecting civilians. The number of civilian casualties from armed conflict in the region, however, has more than doubled in the past year.

Military authorities in North Kivu and Ituri have used broad powers given to them under the State of Siege to suppress any form of protest or criticism. Human rights activists and MPs who

have criticized the measure's legality, duration or effectiveness have been labelled "enemies of the state" and subjected to arbitrary arrest and prosecution — and in two cases documented killed. At least two peaceful activists have died as a result of authorities' crackdown on critics, including 22-year-old Mumbere Ushindi, who was shot by police during a protest against state of siege's failure to stop the killing of civilians. He died of his gunshot wounds on 24 January 2022. Before the demonstration, a police commander threatened to "crush" anyone who dared to protest.

As you take up your new role Amnesty International implores that you raise the State of Siege in your first meeting with President Tshisekedi. As a close partner the US has incredible influence and should use it to make sure human rights are respected. You should ask President Tshisekedi to **lift all human rights restrictions and ensure that the State of Siege does not become a permanent regime by outlining a clear schedule for ending the restrictions.**

Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders and whistle-blowers continued to be the target of attacks and threats by public institutions which were supposed to protect them. Dozens of pro-democracy and anti-corruption activists, environmental activists, trade union leaders and Indigenous peoples' rights defenders were arbitrarily detained, harassed and even sentenced by courts following unfair trials. The draft law on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, first proposed in 2017, made no progress during 2021. **We urge you to raise this with government actors in the DRC and stress the importance of passing this law to protect human rights defenders.**

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Conflict-related sexual violence remained widespread, especially in the provinces of North and South Kivu, Ituri, Tanganyika and Kasai-Central, despite some encouraging efforts by the authorities to hold perpetrators to account. According to the UN, between January and September 2021, at least 1,100 women were raped in North Kivu and Ituri alone. While President Tshisekedi declared several initiatives which aimed to establish a reparations fund for victims of conflict-related sexual violence, none of these have come to fruition. **We ask that you encourage the Congolese government to do more both to prevent conflict-related sexual violence but also to assist those who have been victims.**

Your role holds with it the ability to bring about meaningful change that could change the trajectory of countless lives. We thank you for your consideration and welcome any opportunity to discuss and collaborate further.