



Building a Nonviolent Future in the DRC by Embracing Peace Now!

Brussels, February 29th, 2024

Pax Christi International stands in solidarity with the victims of the escalating violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

We recognise the **profound hope held by the DRC population for a peaceful existence**, where nonviolent solutions offer tangible pathways to a just future. **With this statement we urge you to hold onto this hope** of a more just and peaceful nation that is rooted in nonviolent living, respect for all people's rights and freedoms. The many projects and initiatives, training of religious sisters and youth in active nonviolence and peacebuilding by Pax Christi International are opportunities to live and practice these values as one of the ways of addressing the deep-rooted violence that the country has endured for three decades. **We support any nonviolent means that you, the people of DRC are engaged in to build harmonious, just, caring communities which are values that are passed on to children and youth through the African cultures.**

As highlighted by the United Nations in October 2023, the **DRC is grappling with one of the most severe internal displacement and humanitarian crises globally, driven by ongoing conflict and rising violence exacerbated by the attacks, both internally and at the border, committed by the M23 armed group supported by Rwanda.**

Over 6.5 million people have been **internally displaced** due to the current unrest, and 25.4 million individuals—equivalent to a quarter of the population—require today **urgent assistance**. The eastern provinces, which have been severely affected by violence and insecurity, bear the brunt of these pressing humanitarian needs.

Epidemics are exacerbating the crisis. Cholera cases reached 50,000 with 470 deaths recorded in 2023, marking the worst outbreak since 2017, while measles-related deaths tripled from 1,800 in 2022 to over 6,000 in 2023. **Climate shocks further aggravate conditions**, with heavy rains and river flooding affecting approximately 2.1 million Congolese and resulting in 300 fatalities between mid-November 2023 and January 2024.

The **DRC's status as the world's largest producer of cobalt ore**, along with substantial copper, gold and diamond production, underscores its significance in global extractive industries. However, **the extractive practices driven by corporate interests and Global North demands often infringe upon community rights, leading to human rights violations and environmental degradation**. Unregulated extractivism, associated with the energy transition, exacerbates conflicts and undermines the autonomy of the country in decision-making. This approach violates the rights of communities to not only healthy living but also sustainable livelihoods and fails to respect the Rights of Mother Earth, our common home, perpetuating injustices and destabilising the region.

The Church's involvement in the DRC is substantial, providing nonviolent alternatives and humanitarian aid through a wide-reaching network encompassing hospitals and schools, and economic initiatives such as farms and shops. **Pax Christi International, together with its network in the Great Lakes region and other key Catholic organisations continue supporting efforts from the Great Lakes region taking part in key momentums in fostering the dialogue approach:**

- The [Mass of Solidarity for Peace](#) on 28 January 2024, where 68 Bishops and Cardinals from Burundi, Rwanda, and DRC gathered in Goma (DRC), followed by [statement of the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa \(ACEAC\) Bishops](#), which further underlined their request to urge leaders to embark on a true path of solidarity creating a community where just peace ethics values become part of life.
- The [Mass in solidarity with the victims in the east of the DRC](#) on 24 February in Kinshasa (DRC), where, in the presence of diplomats and the faithful, His Eminence Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo called on leaders to act to put an end to the suffering of the population, denouncing the silence of the international community.

These momentums are hailed as beacons of nonviolence amidst the conflict.

Pax Christi International calls for humanitarian solutions and a human rights-based approach to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Therefore, we ask:

- **The United Nations and the European Union to:**
 - Prioritise the DRC crisis in their agendas, taking concrete actions to cease violence and provide consistent **humanitarian aid**, providing essential support to the displaced population by meeting their basic needs.
 - Focus concretely towards addressing the root causes of violence, by committing into a **robust diplomatic effort** to ensure dialogue remains the primary and sole approach, empowering any diplomatic endeavours as the ones launched and implemented by the Government of Angola.
 - Stringent supervision on the trade of weapons, which is increasing and facilitating the exacerbation of violence in the country, **adopting sanctions where needed**.
- **The decision-makers in the Global North to:**
 - Carefully evaluate how their economic decisions impact the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and worsen the crisis.
 - Utilise diplomatic channels to promote peace processes and to actively involve local, national and international civil society organisations to gain a genuine understanding of the situation and facilitate collaborative solutions.
 - Guarantee centrality of the respect for Human and Environmental Rights in the decision-making processes, ensuring that economic interests do not jeopardise the well-being, sustainability, or lives of local communities in the DRC.
- **The international civil society, including faith-based organisations and networks, to:**
 - Continue their efforts in promoting dialogue and supporting the affected population, serving as beacons of justice and peace in the region.
 - Rely on the willingness of young people in the region for a better future and start planning with them and the overall communities' paths of reparations and historical justice.