

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:

HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS

HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

FOREIGN RELATIONS

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

October 10, 2007

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

I am writing to express my concern about the escalation of sexual violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since armed conflicts erupted again there six weeks ago.

The violence has been marked, in particular, by systematic sexual assaults against women. In 2004, Amnesty International estimated that at least 40,000 women and girls were systematically raped and tortured in the DRC since 1998. In 2006, the United Nations reported 27,000 sexual assaults against women and girls in South Kivu province alone. Human Rights Watch has documented cases of rape victims as young as three years old. The *New York Times* recently reported that, in one town in the DRC, 70 percent of Congolese women reported being sexually brutalized. The perpetrators – including disgruntled government soldiers, homegrown militia groups, and former Hutu militiamen who fled into Congo's forests after participating in the 1994 Rwandan genocide – have sustained their armed conflicts by exploiting the country's natural resources, raiding villages and committing violent atrocities.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security and Democracy Promotion Act, which I introduced in December 2005 and which was signed into law by President Bush on December 22, 2006, identifies such systematic sexual violence as a particular threat in Congo. That law states, in part, that U.S. policy shall be to

“urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to recognize and act upon its responsibilities to immediately bring discipline to its security forces, hold those individuals responsible for atrocities and other human rights violations, particularly the rape of women and girls as an act of war, accountable and bring such individuals to justice;”

“help halt the high prevalence of sexual abuse and violence perpetrated against women and children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and mitigate the detrimental effects from acts of this type of violence by undertaking a number of health, education, and psycho-social support programs;”

“work aggressively on a bilateral basis to urge governments of countries contributing troops to the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (MONUC) to enact and enforce laws on trafficking in persons and sexual abuse that meet international standards, promote codes of conduct for troops serving as part of United Nations peacekeeping missions, and immediately investigate and punish citizens who are responsible for abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

In that regard, I ask that you provide responses to the following questions:

1. Do you have reason to believe that any DRC armed forces have been involved in mass rapes in the eastern DRC during the recent violence?
2. What mechanisms exist to investigate and report on allegations of such violence?
3. What, if any, investigations have been undertaken, and what have been the results of such investigations?
4. To date, have any individuals been held accountable for such violence?
5. What is the nature of U.S. support for efforts to build the new Congolese armed forces and what elements of that support, if any, raise awareness about the importance of this issue of sexual violence?
6. Is any U.S. support contingent on the DRC government taking steps to address this issue?
7. What steps, if any, is the U.S. taking diplomatically to develop a consensus position among all donors contributing to the rebuilding of the Congolese armed force about the importance of addressing sexual violence?
8. What resources has the United States government dedicated to victims of sexual violence over the course of the last six years?
9. How is the U.S. ensuring that the UN, and all countries that contribute troops to MONUC, are abiding by codes of conduct for the prevention of sexual abuse and trafficking?

I thank you in advance for the consideration of these questions, and I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barack Obama', written in a cursive style.

Barack Obama  
United States Senator