



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

22 December 2008

Ms Libby Rogerson  
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in New South Wales  
PO Box 259  
ROSEBERY NSW 1445

Dear Ms Rogerson

Thank you for your letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith, dated 5 December 2008, concerning the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). I have been asked to reply on behalf of Mr Smith.

The Australian Government shares your concern at the humanitarian and security crisis in the DRC. The Government is particularly alarmed by reports – such as those in the Caritas report mentioned in your letter – of targeted killings and abuses of civilians, widespread sexual violence, use of child soldiers, and the displacement of more than 250,000 people. Mr Smith delivered a statement in Parliament on 13 November expressing the Government's alarm at the situation and setting out the action Australia is taking to help resolve the crisis. Mr Smith's statement is attached.

Australia is making a concrete contribution to humanitarian aid efforts in eastern DRC, having pledged \$5 million in emergency assistance since early November. This aid will be divided between a number of international agencies, including the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Up to \$1 million of the funds will go to Australian non-government organisations on the ground, including Caritas, World Vision and CARE Australia.

These organisations were chosen given their ability to access difficult areas in the DRC and the size of their operations. Australia's aid contributions will help provide essential medical and health care, protect women and children, deliver emergency food and water, and establish and manage camps for internally displaced persons.

Australia also supports efforts to bring stability to the DRC through financial contributions to the UN Organisation Mission in the DRC (MONUC). Australia contributed US\$14.5 million

to MONUC in 2007-08, and has provided US\$10.2 million so far this financial year. The Government welcomed the recent decision by the UN Security Council to reinforce MONUC.

The Government is also supporting efforts to address conflict in the DRC through the UN Human Rights Council. Australia co-sponsored the convening of a special session of the Council on 28 November and 1 December, and made a statement calling on all parties in the DRC to end human rights abuses in the country. The report produced at the special session condemned in particular the many instances of sexual violence in the conflict.

Australia is playing its part to prevent the illegal supply of arms to combatants in the DRC by implementing the UN Security Council sanctions regime against the country into Australian domestic law. The sanctions include restrictions on the supply of arms to non-government entities and the provision of training or funding for military activities.

Australia stands alongside the UN and others in the international community in their diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, the root causes of which are longstanding and complex. The Government welcomes the calls of the UN Secretary-General for an immediate ceasefire in eastern DRC, the creation of aid corridors to allow urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance, and implementation of peace agreements previously signed between the parties. The Government supports the ongoing efforts of UN Special Envoy Obasanjo and regional organisations to mediate a lasting peace.

Australia will continue to support humanitarian, peacekeeping and diplomatic efforts to help those most in need in the DRC.

Thank you for bringing your views to the attention of the Government.

Yours sincerely



Jon Richardson  
Director  
Africa Section

13 November 2008

## **Question Without Notice: Minister for Foreign Affairs**

### **Assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The Australian Government is very deeply concerned about the recent outbreak of violence and fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regrettably, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a country with a terrible recent history of conflict and suffering. Its people have suffered two civil wars between 1996 and 2003 and it is estimated that they have claimed over five million lives as a result of violence and consequence disease and starvation.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo in conjunction with the international community, including the United Nations, has made considerable efforts in recent times to restore stability and rebuild national unity. Since 2000 a United Nations peacekeeping organisation has been present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and over the years Australia has given substantial and strong support to that UN peacekeeping organisation, contributing over \$30 million as part of Australia's contribution to UN peacekeeping.

Very regrettably, as members would be aware, we have recently seen conflict break out again. In October the forces of General Nkunda moved through North Kivu province in the east, defying not just government forces but also those UN peacekeepers. There have been alarming reports of targeted violence against civilians, including lootings and killings and the use of rape as an instrument of war.

There have been intense international community efforts to seek to resolve the crisis. I refer to the efforts of Foreign Secretary Miliband and French Foreign Minister Kouchner, who flew to the region to meet with President Kagame of Rwanda and President Kabila of the Republic. In early November the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon held an emergency meeting in Nairobi of African heads of states. The Secretary-General has called for an immediate ceasefire, the establishment of aid corridors to allow urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance, reinforcement of the UN peacekeeping mission and implementation of peace agreements previously signed.

The Government very much welcomes the recent announcement by SADC, the Southern African Development Community, to provide not just support to those sentiments expressed by the secretary-general but also immediate military and humanitarian aid. Australia stands alongside the secretary-general in his efforts to see a resolution to this crisis.

Whilst it is appropriate for Australia to make a contribution to peacekeeping through its contribution to the United Nations, it is not, in the government's view, appropriate to make a military or a peacekeeping contribution in terms of boots on the ground. But it is important for Australia to consider the need for urgent humanitarian aid and assistance.

Early in November, in response to the crisis, I announced that we would apply \$1 million emergency humanitarian assistance, enabling us to give consideration to further humanitarian assistance on the basis of the United Nations assessment.

I am able to advise the House today that Australia will make, all up, a contribution of \$5 million for humanitarian assistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It comprises the \$4 million that I am announcing today, \$3 million of which will go to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to deal with nearly 250,000 displaced people, to UNICEF and to the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. One million dollars will go to Australian NGOs who have a presence in Africa.

Of the \$1 million previously announced, as I have indicated before, half a million dollars will go to the World Health Organisation and half a million dollars will go to UNICEF. The funding of these agencies will allow for the immediate needs for those adversely affected by the violence, in particular food, health, water and the protection of women.

Australia's desire to assist is not just a reflection of our desire to be a good international citizen but also a reflection of the government's view that Australia needs to increase and enhance its commitment to the countries of Africa and to engage with the countries of Africa. Australia needs to forge broader and deeper relations with the countries of Africa and build on the people-to-people and commercial links which have burgeoned in recent years.

We welcome the increasingly strong voice of African nation states and we look forward to playing our part in the peace and security of the continent of Africa, including, and in particular, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.