

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights

Testimony of

Ben Affleck,
Founder of the Eastern Congo Initiative

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Ben Affleck and I am the founder of the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI). ECI is the only U.S. based grant-making and advocacy organization wholly focused on working with and for the people of eastern Congo—an area that carries the unwanted distinction of being the deadliest and most volatile region of the country—and one of the deadliest in the world. According to the United Nations, the crisis in eastern Congo has displaced an estimated 2.1 million Congolese, and has led to over 1000 rapes being committed every month. The International Rescue Committee estimates that 5.4 million people have lost their lives in the conflict since 1998. That number continues to increase at a staggering rate of almost 45,000 a month. Half of these deaths are children under the age of five. Not all were killed in combat, but rather perished from the ravages that accompany this horrific region: malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia and malnutrition.

ECI funds efforts that help protect the most vulnerable people within the Congo, including child soldiers and survivors of sexual violence. ECI also works with local groups focused on education, economic opportunity, capacity building, and legal reform. I thank you for your attention to the Congo and for holding this important hearing.

Today's hearing occurs on International Women's Day, so it is particularly appropriate to call attention to the continued suffering of women and girls in eastern Congo, as well as the undeniable strength they exhibit in the face of ongoing atrocities.

I would like to recognize Cindy McCain who is here with us today and who recently joined ECI as a Founding Member and an investor. Cindy and I just returned from eastern Congo where we saw firsthand the tragedy and the triumph of the Congolese people.

I. Introduction

Having just returned from the Congo last month and I can assure you that Congo is on the brink. If Congo continues on its current path, women like Laba Kamana will perish under the weight of armed groups. Laba was captured by rebel soldiers at the age of 14 in South Kivu and held as a sex slave for two years. She was raped daily by her captors before she escaped by walking through a jungle for a week to safety. She then discovered she was pregnant with the child of one of the soldiers. The counselors of a remarkable Congolese organization, called Let Africa Live, found Laba and took her in. They provided her with counseling and job training, and while caring for her new daughter, she used her skills to start a small business and earned enough income to return to school. Laba, now 22 years old, is in her third year of studying law and advocates for the rights of women using her own story. Unfortunately, Laba is the exception. Most women never escape.

It is ECI's goal to ensure that more "Laba" successes happen and, more importantly, that more young women never have to experience the hardship that she endured. ECI provides grants to individuals like Dr. Denis Mukwege, the head of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, and to Jo and Lynn Lusi of Goma's HEAL Africa Hospital. I would like to share with you the nature of some of the groups that ECI is privileged to work with on behalf of Congo.

HEAL Africa reaches tens of thousands of people each year through community action, and works to transform local communities through: **Health, Education, community Action** and

Leadership development. Founded in 1994 by an orthopedic surgeon and his wife who wanted to train health care workers, it has promoted safe motherhood in the region since 2003. It is the cornerstone in eastern Congo for promoting the right of women to deliver safely at a health facility.

ECI also provides hundreds of rural women with the opportunity to create their own income generating business plans through micro-grants. One inspiring group created their own maternal health insurance collective to provide financial support to safely deliver their children at health centers. As a complement to this initiative, ECI also provides emergency obstetric training for nearly 100 health professionals and midwives working from 15 health centers in remote areas of North Kivu.

As children are also a core focus for ECI, we partner with a local organization called Children's Voice. Children's Voice was formed in the aftermath of the most intense period of violence in Goma and serves the needs of orphans and former child soldiers or sex slaves living in extreme poverty. This year, Children's Voice provided an accelerated schooling program for 591 vulnerable children.

These are just a few of the projects we have committed our resources to achieve. We know, however, that we can not pave the road to peace, stability, and self-reliance by ourselves. The United States and the international community must continue to be active participants in this struggle.

While the tendency is to lose hope from 35,000 feet—we believe that great progress can be and is being made. It must be generated by the Congolese themselves and it must be done person by person, brick by brick. When an orphan or former child soldier is enrolled in school, they not only receive an academic education but they are socialized, learning to develop healthy

relationships with others (including women) so that they have learned a value of human life and will be less likely to go out and cause to someone else the damage that was done to them. One is less likely to participate in rape if one knows, values and respects women in one's own life.

When militiamen and soldiers (the vast majority young, unemployed men) are trained in a trade, and work is located for them in the private sector which utilizes these skills, supported by the local community—they are less likely to return to the bush, return to the militias and participate in the kinds of mass atrocities and killings which fill the newspapers and in turn cause those in a position to help bring change to throw up their hands.

At each step, each Congolese group that puts themselves on the line, at risk and at service for their fellow citizen—is making the difference in Congo on the hardest part of the problem.

But they can't do it alone; the work there is, while not unsolvable, certainly large in scope. Regional actors, NGO's, local governments, the IMF, World Bank, UN and international community must all play their part.

We must do our part. It doesn't cost a lot of money, it doesn't unduly burden the deficit, but it does add to the moral standing of our country. It doesn't require extreme sacrifice elsewhere in government—but it can ameliorate suffering, terrible suffering in place which is, in fact, not so far away.

All we need is focus. It requires our attention and our priority. It requires a special advisor to coordinate between agencies, it requires diplomatic energy and it requires a concrete commitment.

II. Background

Since my first visit to Congo in 2006, I have witnessed efforts to improve governance, promote economic growth, and reduce conflict. Unfortunately, despite some positive movement, the record over the last five years is not promising. Congo is moving in a negative direction and its fragile democratic progress is at risk. If this does not change, the country risks heading into another, deeper spiral of violence which could lead to more fighting and suffering, and could risk destabilizing surrounding Central African countries like Rwanda—a country that is on its own precarious road to stability.

The US government has a long history of involvement in Congo, from our shameful assistance in the coup that killed Lumumba and brought in Mobutu to some admirable recent efforts. In the early 2000s, the United States government helped bring to the table the various forces then fighting in Congo. The U.S. government also provided key funding for Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration programs and played a major role in helping peace and development return to Congo's embattled Ituri district. Over the last few years, Secretary of State Clinton has visited the region, and USAID has escalated its efforts in eastern Congo, including providing humanitarian assistance through the Food for Peace program. This commitment has indeed paid dividends in Congo. But with conflict persisting and elections coming up, we must develop a cohesive strategy and fully engage on this issue.

The US supported the deployment of the UN Mission to the Congo, initially known as MONUC, and continued to strongly support it as it became the largest peacekeeping operation in the world. From 2003-2006, the US stayed heavily engaged—both diplomatically and financially—helping the Congolese government and people find stability.

In 2006, millions of Congolese voted for the first time in a free and fair democratic election. Voting in 50,000 polling places around the country, the Congolese people elected

President Joseph Kabila. It was a period of great excitement and high hopes, and the United States played an important role.

Starting in 2007, the U.S., along with others in the West, drew back involvement. Instead of continuing a high level of engagement to help consolidate a new, fragile democracy, Congo was treated as if it were a well-functioning state from which the United Nations Mission in Congo could be safely withdrawn. This notion was quickly dispelled when rebels waged a new battle against the government in eastern Congo in 2007 and 2008 that brought another terrible round of death, displacement, and destruction.

With U.S. attention distracted, the tide had turned. In 2008, the CNDP (Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple; National Congress for the People's Defense) nearly overran the capital city of North Kivu and brutally massacred 150 people in Kiwanja, a town just north of Goma. While international attention briefly focused on the Congo in October and November 2008, it took a secret agreement between President Kabila and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda to end the rebellion and to reduce the Congolese presence of the FDLR (Forces Démocratiques de la Libération du Rwanda; Democratic Force for Rwandan Liberation), a rebel group led by Rwandan Hutus who participated in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Even with the Congolese army's coordinated efforts with MONUC to move FDLR out of the country, other armed groups take their place. The CNDP, which—on paper—has been integrated into the Congolese National Army, is still responsible for horrible crimes committed against Congolese civilians, including sexual violence. The CNDP also controls and illegally exploits many of eastern Congo's mines.

CNDP Commander Bosco Ntaganda is an example of the dichotomy of CNDP's presence in the national army. Bosco is responsible for numerous atrocities and, while I was in Congo last

month, was implicated in a gold smuggling scheme worth tens of millions of dollars. Yet, he is the Deputy Commander of the Congolese National Army in North Kivu. Men under his command continue to commit human rights violations throughout the region.

III. Major Issues

A. Support for Girls and Women in Congo

Even with the successful operations against the FDLR, unacceptable levels of abuse against civilians continue across eastern Congo. Unfortunately, most of the abuses are committed by members of the Congolese army. The army remains a largely ineffective fighting force against those that work against Congo stability, but surprisingly efficient when it comes to terrorizing Congo's civilian population.

Girls and women across rural areas continue to live in fear of their own security forces. Although there have been some prosecutions of soldiers for these crimes, they have been too few and too far between. As we applaud the good news regarding the recent prosecution of Congolese soldiers for horrible rapes committed in South Kivu, we must remember that the vast majority of these crimes still occur with no consequence for perpetrators. For example, yet another Congolese commander was convicted and imprisoned in 2006 for recruiting child soldiers. He escaped from prison and holds a post as a senior commander in the Congolese Army.

There are some bright spots. The UN force, renamed MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), has the protection of civilians as its most important task. The present head of MONUSCO, Roger Meece, is a distinguished retired American diplomat who served twice in the Congo, including as

Ambassador from 2004-2007. Meece has publicly advocated for increased support from the international community. Without increased resources, however, MONUSCO core objective is severely threatened.

B. Protecting the Electoral Process in November 2011

In a recent report, the UN Secretary General stated that “delays in the voter registration process and with respect to the adoption of essential legislation posed challenges to the timely holding of the polls.” The report detailed a number of other concerns over preparations for upcoming elections. If the situation continues in the same direction as it is now, Congo will have deeply flawed elections in November that will not meet minimal international standards and will be neither free nor fair.

An unfair election with an illegitimate result tarnishes the victor, depriving them of the legitimacy that only comes when citizens elect their leaders in genuinely free and fair elections.

An electoral outcome that is questioned, along with a depleted MONUSCO presence, could perpetuate another downward spiral of violence, division, and rupture in the Congo. The last time Congo collapsed, armies came in from across Africa and five million people died. We must learn from history.

V. U.S. Involvement

In this time of heightened concern over Federal spending, some suggest that austerity demands we turn a blind eye to the crisis in Congo. Nothing could be more misguided. It would simply be a “penny wise and pound foolish” to allow the Congo to again fall into a state of chaos and humanitarian crisis. If Congo were to collapse again, as members of this Subcommittee

know very well, the United States would respond generously to save lives. We have done so in the past in Congo by providing hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance through the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Food for Peace, and through various United Nation (UN) agencies (e.g., UNICEF). Our goal must be to *avert* a humanitarian disaster by proactive investment. The path to stability in today's Congo requires fostering stable elections and preventing another disaster that could easily require hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance.

In the UN Secretary General's recent report, he stated: "With regard to funding, the European Union and Belgium announced contributions of 47.5 million euros and 12.5 million euros, respectively, for the general elections, leaving a funding gap of \$25 million. Other donors have indicated their willingness to consider additional funding. The Congolese Government contribution is expected to amount to \$154 million, or approximately 60 per cent of the budget needed as estimated by the Independent Electoral Commission for the general elections." Surely, the United States can work with others to help fill the funding gap.

Let me be clear; what I'm addressing is not simply a matter of increasing a dollar amount. What I would humbly request is that the US government takes a hard look at its current commitment to support the elections and ask if it offering the assistance needed to truly support a free and fair election. Is there enough support to the government of the DRC to implement a comprehensive plan for a national election? Is there enough support for training of election workers, polling stations and local observers? Are we as a nation offering enough assistance, overall, to say with integrity that we have made an honest effort to help another nation give its citizens the freedom of choice that democracy demands? I sincerely hope that by the time the election arrives in November we can answer in the affirmative.

The time for decisions is upon us. Today, with national elections only eight months away, the US is not focused on Congo, even with events like the recent attack on the president's residence in Kinshasa. That, paired with Congo's recent history should remind everyone of the fragility of Congo's democratic progress and stability.

VI. Next Steps

In November 2010, the Eastern Congo Initiative released a White Paper, *Strengthening United States Foreign Policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. The paper discusses steps the US should take to promote progress in the Congo. I request that a summary of the paper be included in the record of this hearing. I've included a more detailed explanation of the steps we believe are necessary in my written testimony.

1. The US government must do more to support a multidimensional strategy to protect civilians, girls, women, men and boys from the onslaught of violence in rural eastern Congo. This is best accomplished through a range of measures, including:
 - a. Strengthening the professionalism and discipline of vetted Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) troops serving in eastern Congo;
 - b. Providing technical and logistical support to the FARDC and UN in neutralizing foreign armed groups, such as the FDLR;
 - c. Exerting diplomatic pressure within the UN Security Council to ensure more proactive engagement by MONUSCO in protecting civilians;
 - d. Supporting ongoing efforts to demobilize and reintegrate combatants into civilian life; and

- e. Sending a strong signal that those responsible for war crimes and other crimes against humanity are at risk of arrest by working with the Congolese Government and MONUSCO. With individuals like Bosco Ntaganda roaming free, no credible case can be made that serious efforts are under way to quell the atrocities occurring in the eastern Congo.
2. **The US must do more to support the 2011 elections.** In addition to providing diplomatic support for free and fair elections, the US should support robust election monitoring efforts by Congolese civil society and by credible international organizations. Once the elections occur, the free and fair nature of the results should be above reproach. A finding of anything less risks Congo's stability and democratic progress.

To ensure that this process gets on track as soon as possible, a team of technical electoral experts from concerned countries and relevant international organizations should travel as soon as possible to the Congo to report on what is required to achieve free and fair elections, including the financial obligations required and the logistics needed. Such a team should have at least one member from the US and should meet with Congolese, MONUSCO, members of Congolese political parties, and civil society. The result should be the presentation of findings and recommendations by early Spring.

3. To ensure that the United States steps up to the serious challenges to stability in Africa and democratic progress posed by the Congo, **the President or Secretary of State should appoint a Special Representative for the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.** The appointment should occur as soon as possible in order to coordinate the US response to the challenges at issue in the Congo.

While I strongly believe that doing more to protect civilians and to promote democratic elections needs to be the highest priorities for the US right now, there are other important efforts that must continue. Efforts to address the treatment of conflict minerals and to end the threat posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are also of serious concern.

This is ambitious agenda, but it can be accomplished. In December 2005, then Senator Obama introduced a bill entitled the Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act of 2006 (the 2006 law). The bill had a bipartisan list of Senate cosponsors, including then Senator Clinton. On December 6, 2006, it passed the House by voice vote. On December 22, 2006, President Bush signed the bill into law. The message is simple: It can be done.

The goals of the 2006 law are still relevant today. Yet, the US has waned its attention on the real threat posed by an unsecure Congo and ceased its compliance with the law. For example, Section 107 of the law states that "the President should appoint a Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region to help coordinate efforts to resolve the instability and insecurity in Eastern Congo." Former Representative Howard Wolpe served for a short time in 2009 and 2010 as a Special Advisor to Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Carson, but resigned for health reasons last fall. He has not been replaced. Yet the need for the Special Envoy remains as acute as it was in 2006. In fact, with the upcoming Congolese elections on the horizon, the need for a Special Envoy may be more important now than ever.

VII. Conclusion

My testimony today is, in short, a plea to you to insist that the Executive Branch take the necessary steps to implement the key provisions of the 2006 law. I strongly believe that if we continue to place the Congo on the back burner of US policy it will come back to haunt us. The

federal government may view the national budget as a zero sum game, but our morality, our sense of decency and compassion for our fellow human beings is not. It must not be. Recognizing one tragedy need not diminish understanding and empathy for another. Our basic sense of humanity and compassion is not at a fixed number. It expands with our vision, it can grow with our purpose, but our moral compass is fixed—our sunrise, our east, as a nation, even when we have failed, has always pointed us toward what’s right. Not what’s easy, not what’s cheap—but what we can live with when we go to sleep at night.

The values we hold as true are priceless to us. They are the soul of our nation – rooted in our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, and our Declaration of Independence. We believe in being free from the tyranny of violence. We believe in life and liberty and we believe basic human rights are not just important, not a thing to be “worked toward”—but a fundamental right to be demanded for all mankind.

These ideas make us who we are and they make us great. But if our foreign policy does not reflect those principles it undermines our ideals.

I have seen firsthand the determination and promise of Congolese citizens. They want to live their lives in peace, earn a decent living, and raise their families just like any of us. They would like a voice in their countries’ governance. I will never give in to the attitude that Congo is hopeless or too complex. It is not. The seventy million people of the Congo deserve a better tomorrow, and the Eastern Congo Initiative, Cindy and I will work tirelessly to help.

It is in the interest of all of us here to help the people of the Congo move forward towards democracy and respect for human rights and to move away from the multiple crises and horrors of the last fifteen years.

Thank you very much. I am very happy to expand on any of these points in response to your questions.

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

“TRUTH IN TESTIMONY” DISCLOSURE FORM

Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives and the Rules of the Committee require the disclosure of the following information. A copy of this form should be attached to your written testimony and will be made publicly available in electronic format, per House Rules.

1. Name:	2. Organization or organizations you are representing:
Benjamin Affleck	Eastern Congo Initiative
3. Date of Committee hearing:	
March 8, 2011	
4. Have you received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?	5. Have any of the <u>organizations you are representing</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
6. If you answered yes to either item 4 or 5, please list the source and amount of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant was you or the organization(s) you are representing. You may list additional grants or contracts on additional sheets.	
<p>USAID, \$150,000 for Eastern Congo Initiative landscape analysis. ECI is conducting a la</p> <div style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">+</div>	
7. Signature:	
	

Please attach a copy of this form to your written testimony.

Additional Information:

ECI is conducting a landscape analysis in partnership with USAID. The landscape analysis will give detailed capacity building and funding needs and program information about Congolese community-based organizations working in eastern Congo.