



Testimony by

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Presented to:

**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights
Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey, Chairman**

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

“The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Securing Peace in the Midst of Tragedy”

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I. Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Smith (NJ) for calling this very important hearing concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and for giving Catholic Relief Services (CRS) the opportunity to testify before this committee. I also would like to thank the Ranking Member, Mr. Payne (NJ). Mr. Smith, I know how passionate you are about advocating for survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in the DRC and Mr. Payne, I know your interest in the region has led you to travel to the country several times, dating back to when the DRC was known as Zaire.

Let me also take a moment to thank Mr. McDermott (WA), one of the original authors of the Congo Conflict Minerals provision -- Section 1502 -- in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (Dodd-Frank) which passed last year. For more than 15 years, the DRC has been plagued by regional conflict and a deadly scramble for its vast natural resources, which have contributed to the rape of hundreds of thousands of women and girls. Without taking a position on the overall legislation, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and CRS urged members of Congress to support this provision. Many of you did, and we are grateful. The Congo Conflict Minerals provision will help end the war in Congo and curb sexual violence.

My name is Francisca Vigaud-Walsh and I am the CRS Advisor for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). I coordinate and oversee our efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-related violence in conflict and disaster-affected communities worldwide. Much of my effort is focused on the DRC, given the sheer magnitude of this problem there.

In my testimony, after providing background on CRS in the DRC, I will explain the unique position and role of the Catholic Church in responding to needs, alleviating human suffering, and providing hope to millions of Congolese people. I will summarize how CRS works in partnership with the Church to support these efforts highlighting our work to address SGBV. I will then give our brief analysis of the ongoing tragedy in the DRC with a focus on SGBV. Finally, I will draw attention to some critical issues related to SGBV and women's participation in the DRC, concluding the presentation with several recommendations for the U.S. government (USG).

II. Background

CRS has been present in the DRC since 1961 working in a range of sectors including education, health, HIV/AIDS, agriculture, peacebuilding, governance, and sexual and gender-based violence. We have also regularly responded to humanitarian emergencies, including providing shelter to those left homeless by the 2003 volcanic eruption in Goma, and providing non-food items and other assistance to populations displaced by violence in the Kivus. We have projects in all ten provinces, including recent interventions in Province Orientale to assist those suffering at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army. We have offices in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Bukavu, and Goma, and currently employ more than 130 national staff and 13 international staff in country.

In the DRC, CRS works in close partnership with the local Catholic Church. Over 35 million Catholics live in the DRC (55% of the total population of 67 million) and the Church has an extensive network reaching the most remote areas of the country. In the absence of functioning government structures, the Catholic Church has for decades provided most of the basic services such as health care and education. The Church in the DRC is a known, trusted, effective local institution. The courageous Congolese religious leaders and lay personnel who staff the vast network of parishes, providing services at great risk to themselves, are amongst the true heroes in the DRC.

Our DRC program receives resources from a variety of sources, including the United States Government. We currently have five active U.S. government-funded projects in the DRC and all five are implemented via our local church partners. This tri-partite arrangement of USG-CRS-Church extends the reach and magnifies the impact of USG assistance into remote areas with needy, vulnerable populations that could not be reached otherwise.

In eastern and north-eastern DRC, the Catholic Church, in strong partnership with CRS, has been a major player responding to the conflict, delivering lifesaving humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons, returnees and host families. In North Kivu, for example, CRS and our local Church partner provide food items through voucher fairs to more than 9,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) a month. In the Haut-Uele district of Orientale Province in the heart of LRA-affected territory, CRS and its church partners are providing seeds and tools to both IDPs

and host communities, as well as establishing mechanisms for safe access to fields, through a USAID/OFDA project. Parallel to that, we work through the local Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission to ensure that FARDC provides security to groups cultivating their fields.

The Church has also been active in peacebuilding in eastern DRC promoting local community reconciliation and conflict resolution mechanisms, as well as launching regional initiatives. For example, with resources from USAID and in partnership with CRS, the Diocese of Uvira's Justice and Peace Commission is currently implementing a project aims to prevent and manage violence stemming from the reintegration of ex-combatants and community-level disputes. The project uses activities like trainings, dialogue sessions, radio programs, and publications, as well as sports and cultural events. Focusing on the regional aspects of the conflict, CRS and others supported a ground-breaking "Conference for Peace and Reconciliation of the Catholic Bishops of the Great Lakes Region" in Bujumburu last October that included delegates from the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. Participants identified common challenges and needs and agreed to develop a common strategic plan and create a mechanism for more agile regional coordination.

In addition, the Church seeks to address the root causes of the conflicts and violence. In several statements issued over the last decade, the Church has raised the alarm about the link between illicit exploitation of minerals and the perpetuation of the violence in the eastern DRC. In 2009, the DRC Bishops' Conference wrote to urge support for Congress' proposed conflict minerals legislation, calling the exploitation of natural resources by armed groups "one of the causes, if not the main cause, of tragedy in Eastern Congo." Just recently, the Church held several workshops on the implications of the Congo conflict minerals provision (section 1502 of Dodd-Frank) and to design activities that can complement its implementation.

Conflict minerals are also a central focus of the DRC Catholic Bishops' Conference's Commission for Natural Resources, which recently deployed eleven observers dedicated to monitoring the impacts of mining and its links with conflict. In his recent visits to the United States, Bishop Djomo, the President of the DRC Catholic Bishops' Conference, discussed conflict minerals and spoke of the importance of stepping up USG efforts to work with the governments of the Great Lakes Region to end the conflict.

The Church is particularly important in responding to sexual violence. In eastern Congo, I have repeatedly come across rape survivors who have walked many kilometers from their displacement camp to seek support at the nearest Parish. The camps are equipped with health clinics that can and do provide services to rape survivors, but the fear of stigmatization by their fellow camp dwellers, coupled with the trust in the Church, drives some to seek assistance from the Church. The Church provides a safe haven for stigmatized survivors and facilitates trauma counseling, medical services, and legal assistance in prosecuting cases.

CRS and the Church have implemented numerous project activities to respond to the SGBV crisis. In South Kivu, as part of the USAID-funded Project AXxes that ended in September 2010, CRS facilitated training at Kaziba Hospital in techniques for fistula repair. We provided fistula repair kits to both Panzi and Kaziba hospital and in FY 2010 supported more than 200 corrective surgeries for fistula. Through another component of Project AXxes, CRS worked with a local

Catholic NGO Centre Olame (part of the Bukavu Diocesan structure) to prevent sexual violence against women by sensitizing communities and by mobilizing local leaders (administrative, military, and traditional) and civil society organizations in 17 health zones in South Kivu. The project trained 508 transitional justice leaders and 228 military and police officials in SGBV awareness, supporting them to become community sensitization leaders.

CRS currently partners with CARITAS and the Justice and Peace Commissions of the Dioceses of Bukavu and Uvira along with Centre Olame to implement an International Criminal Court/ Trust Fund for Victims (ICC/TFV) –funded project that ensures survivor-access to psychosocial and medical assistance in South Kivu. There is also a strong community mobilization and public awareness component as well as socio-economic reintegration activities for survivors of sexual violence and other vulnerable women via the CRS Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) micro-finance methodology. The project has thus far reached 11,250 persons in 75 communities, trained 150 community workers and 325 community leaders, and formed SILC groups with 1400 women. Due to the success of this project, we will expand it and add a local peacebuilding component that involves the formation of “peace clubs” and leader training in intra-community conflict resolution.

CRS and local church partners have been particularly active in supporting mechanisms to address the psychosocial needs of SGBV survivors. Over the past several years, we have collaborated to facilitate the training of counselors in psychosocial support and trauma healing in Kindu (Maniema province), Kisangani (Orientale Province), Mbandaka (Equateur), and Fizi (South Kivu), as well as the creation and capacity building of “listening centers” for survivors in Maniema and Fizi.

With funding from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), CRS is also jointly launching an innovative community-based early-warning and protection project in the Orientale, North and South Kivu provinces. 250,000 people will benefit from radio and phone communication network coverage. CRS will provide cell phones, radios, equipment, and training in 50 community "focal points". The project will support efforts to share information with local security forces and the nearest MONUSCO base. The overarching goal is to ensure that communities send and receive timely information on the humanitarian situation, as well as security threats. However, given the limitations of security forces, the project works with communities to protect themselves. Diocesan Justice and Peace animators are conducting awareness-raising sessions for 5,000 community leaders and security forces on preventing sexual violence, and working with communities to develop community protection plans. The combination of these efforts will create community capacity to send early alerts and thus allow more timely, coordinated and effective responses from MONUSCO, other UN agencies, and NGOs to security and humanitarian needs of communities.

These programs, including those funded by the USG, have allowed the humanitarian community to increase thousands of survivors’ access to critical and lifesaving services. We have increased survivors’ access to life-changing fistula repair surgeries. With support from the USG and other donors, we have provided indispensable trauma healing therapy to thousands. We have seen rape survivors learn the income-generating and entrepreneurial skills critical to their survival in the aftermath of being abandoned by her husband and/or ostracized from her village. More and

more religious and community leaders are speaking up against this stigmatization, and more and more women are coming forward to assert their human rights and access services. This suggests that our behavior change and communication programs are working. CRS, the broader humanitarian aid community and the Congolese survivors are thankful for USG support.

III. The Ongoing Tragedy of Sexual and Gender Based Violence in the DRC

DRC has been called the rape capital of the world and this is no cliché. Despite the increased international and USG attention and support in recent years to preventing and responding to sexual violence, this atrocious phenomenon continues to be a daily threat to women, peace and security in the DRC.

In 2008, the UN estimated that at least 200,000 women had been raped since 1998. Three years later, the crisis continues unabated. In 2010, some 8,000 rapes were recorded in South Kivu alone. The international community was horrified as details were shared of the mass rape of more than 300 women, girls, men and boys this past August in Luvungi. Fifteen days later, another attack occurred in the same territory – in Mubi. CRS staff there estimated that over 100 rapes were perpetrated. Since the start of the year, at least 200 rape survivors have sought assistance in Fizi, South Kivu. According to Doctors without Borders, dozens of people were raped just at the exit of the Misisi/Milimba and Bwala/Ibindi markets in South Kivu just two weeks ago. These are only the ‘reported’ figures; the real numbers are in fact much higher. Many women, girls and men – male rape is an increasing phenomenon – do not come forward to seek assistance out of fear of retaliation and stigmatization.

The consequences are unimaginable. Rape survivors are routinely ostracized from their families and communities; they suffer severe medical consequences including urogenital and rectogenital fistula; HIV and STIs such as gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis; they endure life-lasting and sometimes incapacitating post-trauma stress disorder. Some children born of rape – referred to by some Congolese as “Interahamwe babies” in reference to members of the Hutu paramilitary organization involved in the Rwandan genocide and who constitute the FDLR militia group – are abandoned out of shame. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

While we wait for a definitive solution to this conflict, over 1.7 million internally displaced people are unable to return home, simply because home is too unsafe. Insecurity is directly related to sexual violence. Meanwhile, assisting rape survivors is becoming more and more dangerous for us. In 2010, there were 202 attacks on humanitarian workers– a 10% increase against the previous year overall, and up over 100% in South Kivu. The security of a population is one of the main functions of any government. This function is not being exercised effectively in the DRC. On the contrary, a significant proportion of attacks both on civilians and on humanitarian staff are reportedly carried out by sections of the national security services.

IV. What Needs to Be Done

In the face of what may sometimes seem like little progress, it is increasingly important that the USG maintain and expand its support for the critical responses I have already described. USG support needs to be provided with adequate conscience protections and clauses so that it does not

discriminate against faith-based providers, like the Church. If the DRC is to have a future, the hundreds of thousands of women who have been raped must get the care they need and further violence must be prevented. Even within the context of scarce resources, there are cost-effective measures that the USG can implement to reduce the scourge of sexual violence in the DRC and respond to the context of insecurity, conflict and poor governance that promote rape and violence as a weapon of war against the people of eastern Congo.

Yet, why has so little progress been made in curbing rape in the DRC? In part, the sheer magnitude of the problem and its geographical dispersion exceeds the capacity to respond. More importantly, we will not make progress curbing rape until the root causes are addressed; sexual violence cannot be seen within a vacuum. It is the pervasive violence, the lack of infrastructure, the inefficacy of the security sector, the impotent and corrupt justice system, and last but not least, the lack of political will, that impedes effective and comprehensive solutions to this epidemic. Consequently, the United States can do more that can have tangible benefits and impact the numbers of sexual violence.

Sexual violence is inextricably linked to the war – it is a tool, a strategy employed as parties vie for political power and access to the country’s rich natural resources. In the Kivus, the gold trade alone is valued at \$160 million per year, ample incentive for armed actors to use violence as a means to control the communities living in these resource-rich areas.

The Congo Conflict Minerals provision (section 1502 of Dodd-Frank) requires that companies actively research their supply chains to determine whether the production of the minerals used in their commercial products benefits armed groups in the DRC. This is an important part of the provision, and the USCCB and CRS have submitted comments on the draft rules prepared by the Securities and Exchange Commission. We have urged the Commission to design the rules so that they have their intended effect. Other aspects of the provision merit attention as well. It also requires the State Department to develop a strategy to address the linkages between human rights abuses in the DRC, armed groups, mining of conflict minerals, and commercial products. This is vital. We hope that the State Department’s strategy will be strong and comprehensive and that it will serve as a springboard for increased USG engagement with the governments of the DRC and other countries in the region. In addition, we hope that it will include significant attention to the important roles that civil society and the Church can play in working towards peace.

The United States also provides logistical support and intelligence to the armies in the Great Lakes, which makes it a critical partner for the Congolese government. The US can and should use this leverage with the Congolese government to fulfill its security mandate, uphold human rights and effectively protect its civilians. We are aware that the Congolese Government has requested more military support, including the training of other battalions. The USG must link such support to measurable changes in key areas – military/police reform and justice, and full implementation of the 2006 law on sexual violence. The USG should highlight the significant proportion of attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers carried out by members of the security services, and demand that the government ensure that soldiers and police officers are adequately paid, provided for, supported and disciplined in order to curb such attacks.

Similarly, the US should leverage its assistance with progress against impunity and survivor access to justice. In the unprecedented trial two weeks ago of 11 Congolese soldiers accused of mass rape committed on New Year's Day in Fizi, commanding officer Lt. Col. Mutuare Daniel Kibibi was convicted of four counts of crimes against humanity. The Congolese government should be congratulated and encouraged to ensure that these trials become commonplace, for as long as ranking military officers who condone and perpetrate rape roam free, we will not see a reduction in sexual violence. As long as civilians accused of rape can continue to pay the equivalent of \$5 to be released from jail, we will not see a reduction in sexual violence. As long as the State does not exercise its obligation to prosecute rapists, and young survivors are encouraged and/or forced to marry their rapists, sexual violence will continue.

SGBV in the DRC is symptomatic of women's second class status and marginalization from decision-making. Women were consistently excluded from previous peace processes and continue to be sidelined from political power. If women are not empowered and permitted to represent themselves about the challenges they have faced throughout this conflict, and cannot participate in the development of national policies and action plans that address their health, education, economic needs, then who will represent their needs and interests?

The women of the DRC are at a critical juncture. Presidential elections have been scheduled for December 2011. Provincial elections have been delayed several times and are now expected in 2012. As the elections approach, we are already seeing a very worrying trend. Not only are female candidates absent from the process despite the existing vibrant women's civil society, but also those who have secured political positions in previous elections are being pushed out of office. To cite one example, since August 2010, two female leaders in South Kivu endured severe pressure from their male counterparts to resign. The women held the position of Communal *Bourgemestres*, or Mayor of a grouping of cities, which are important positions at the provincial level. The Archbishop of Bukavu met with these leaders to encourage them to resist the pressure, effectively fulfill their mandate and ensure that women's needs are represented in local office. This past November, they were summarily fired and replaced by male politicians.

One of our partners of the Bukavu Diocesan office, with whom we have worked to train army and militia groups on human rights, also serves as President of the Congolese Women's Caucus of South Kivu for Peace. In that capacity, she drafted a declaration alongside women leaders of the Muslim and Protestant communities, demanding that President Kabila respect his previous commitments to gender equality and UN Security Council Resolution 1325. This declaration also exhorts the international community to pressure the DRC government to protect and restore women's rights in political participation. A place needs to be made for the existing female vibrant civil society. The USG, which supports 1325, must leverage its influence with the Congolese government and require that the powerful tools set forth in this resolution are respected as the country prepares for elections. The USG can also support programs that train women leaders and help them to establish a strong support network amongst their constituency.

As a major MONUSCO donor, the USG can help ensure that MONUSCO more effectively fulfills its mandate of civilian protection. MONUSCO can collaborate more effectively with both international and national civil society organizations that have expertise in creating effective and sustainable mechanisms for governance and protection at the community level. Such

mechanisms must include consultation with women's groups to develop protection strategies that address their protection needs.

Ultimately, in order to eradicate SGBV in the DRC, we need to stop the wider more generalized conflict that involves an array of armed groups and factions within the DRC and connected to neighboring countries. This complex interplay of armed actors is aggravated by longstanding simmering local tensions that flare up periodically. Frequently related to land tenure and other scarce resources, and sometimes ethnicity and citizenship, these tensions are exacerbated by refugee returns from neighboring countries.

Military solutions to the conflict have not and will not work. What is needed is negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy with skillfully applied pressure on all the actors – including neighboring countries and most importantly, the Congolese government. The U.S. government needs to step up its role and much more aggressively, urgently, comprehensively and cohesively engage diplomatically in the DRC. The USG must do everything possible to find the pressure points and use its influence to foster processes that will lead to an end to armed conflict. The magnitude of the seemingly never-ending humanitarian crisis and the potential for the fragile situation to get even worse demands a proportionate response.

The upcoming elections scheduled for December 2011 are another reason why USG engagement on the DRC must increase. The DRC people have the right to freely choose their own leaders and hold their leaders accountable. Fraudulent elections could spark a popular reaction that could lead to chaos. In the case of Sudan, U.S. Presidential leadership, and sustained high-level diplomatic attention from the United States contributed definitively to the successful conduct of the recent referendum and, hopefully, the establishment of a new country in the south. This level of attention is needed in the DRC.

V. Summary/Conclusion

We thank the USG for its critical support to programs that assist survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and hope that we can continue to count on this support. Much more must be done, however. I urge the USG to

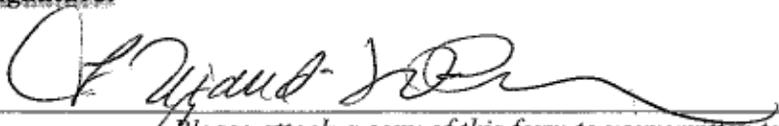
- (1) Implement fully Section 1502 of Dodd-Frank.
- (2) Pressure the Government of the DRC to (a) fulfill its responsibilities to protect its citizens, upholding human rights, (b) end impunity for perpetrators of SGBV, and (c) restore and protect women's rights in political participation.
- (3) Ensure MONUSCO more effectively fulfills its mandate for civilian protection
- (4) Engage in a sustained, high level diplomatic initiative to bring an end to the conflict and violence.

Thank you.

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: Francisca Viguad-Walsh	2. Organization or organizations you are representing: Catholic Relief Services
3. Date of Committee hearing: 8 March 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? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	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
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. see attached spreadsheet	
7. Signature: 	

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

Fund #	Country Name	GRANT#	Donor	Status	Begin Date	Expiration Date	Obligated Amount	Total Award Amount	AWARD TITLE
5738	Congo	SPRMCO08CA075	STATE/BPRM	CLOSED	08/01/2008	09/14/2009	\$ 900,000	\$ 900,000	Southern DRC Emergency Reintegration Assistance
5778	Congo	SubIQC #ICRP-CRS-001	USAID/ARD	CLOSED	07/23/2008	01/22/2011	\$ 715,920	\$ 715,920	Stabilization Program in the Bridging the Gap: Providing Water and Sanitation and Non-Food Item Assistance in North
5819	Congo	DFD-G-00-09-00230-00	USAID/OFDA	EXPIRED	07/16/2009	11/30/2010	\$ 649,921	\$ 649,921	Mobilizing Communities for Reconciliation in Eastern
5834	Congo	AID-623-A-09-00004	USAID/M	OPEN	08/01/2009	07/31/2011	\$ 599,978	\$ 599,978	Package for Improving Education Quality (PIEQ)
5845	Congo	Subaward EDC 11224	USAID/EDC	OPEN	09/15/2009	07/31/2014	\$ 1,953,875	\$ 7,917,392	Repatriate Livelihood Rehabilitation Through
5847	Congo	SPRMCO09CA131	STATE/BPRM	CLOSED	09/15/2009	09/14/2010	\$ 994,470	\$ 994,470	HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care, and Treatment in the DR Congo
5873	Congo	Pre-Award TERMINATED_AID.1365-03-08591-CRT	USAID/PATH	EXPIRED	10/01/2009	08/31/2010	\$ 569,574	\$ 569,574	Responding to Socio-Economic Needs of War-Affected Populations in Dungu
5904	Congo	AID-OFDA-G-10-00048	USAID/OFDA	OPEN	05/25/2010	05/24/2011	\$ 1,406,040	\$ 1,406,040	Improving Socio-Economic Status of Repatriated, Returnees, and Host Families
5946	Congo	SPRMCO10CA139	STATE/BPRM	OPEN	09/15/2010	09/14/2011	\$ 999,186	\$ 999,186	Protecting Communities from Violence Through Improved
5947	Congo	SPRMCO10CA213	STATE/BPRM	OPEN	09/30/2010	09/29/2011	\$ 1,673,860	\$ 1,673,860	