



February 8, 2012

Great Lakes Contact Group:  
Ambassador Frank de Coninck  
Mr. Erik de Feijter  
Ambassador Stéphane Gompertz  
Ambassador Roger Meece  
Ms. Julia Painting  
Ambassador Koen Vervaeke  
Ambassador Barrie Walkley

*Washington, DC*

Dear Members of the Great Lakes Contact Group,

**RE: Urgent Call for International Action to Uphold Democracy and Human Rights in the DRC**

We, the undersigned organizations, are deeply troubled by the post-election crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We believe the international community should urgently strengthen its engagement towards the electoral process and its aftermath in the DRC. The European Union election observation mission, EurAc, the Carter Center, and national election observation missions, most notably the Catholic Church and AETA, as well as donor governments including the United States, the UK, and France, have all stated that the elections held on November 28, 2011, were deeply flawed and marred by widespread irregularities. Permitting these election results to stand without serious attempts to rectify them or to correct the process that led to the flaws will be a serious blow to building democracy in the DRC and is likely to lead to instability.

In order to prevent further violence and to promote democratic legitimacy, we call on the international community to take the following steps immediately:

1. Insist that any solution to the Congolese crisis must be based on respect for democratic principles. We strongly encourage all international actors to stand by this principle and this approach in their efforts to resolve the crisis.
2. Recommend a thorough reform of the Congolese Election Commission (CENI). We believe that the statement issued by the Catholic Bishops of Congo (CENCO) on January 11, 2012, clearly describes the problems created by the elections and offers important recommendations. We fully endorse the Bishops' conclusion that the present Congolese Electoral Commission has lost its credibility, as further demonstrated by the early termination of the international electoral technical assessment mission conducted by IFES

and NDI. We believe that for the CENI to enjoy the credibility it needs to carry out its work, it should be reconstituted with universally respected members and equitable representation from all parties.

3. Strongly and publicly condemn attacks by the security services to suppress citizens' rights and demand accountability. Congolese citizens, opposition supporters and others have been killed, illegally detained, disappeared or otherwise harassed by state security forces during the electoral campaign and in the period following the announcement of the result. The abuses continue. The leading opposition candidate—Etienne Tshisekedi—is now effectively under house arrest. Other opposition candidates have also been threatened and intimidated. The exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly, are being violated by the police and other security forces in what appears to be an effort to repress peaceful protest against the controversial election results. The international community should insist that the Congolese authorities uphold the rule of law, ensure citizens' rights, regardless of their political affiliation, and arrest those responsible for the illegal acts described above.
4. Support the right to peaceful protest. Congolese civil society has been deeply engaged in the electoral process and has scheduled a march on February 16, 2012, to call for justice, democratically legitimate institutions, and to commemorate the 1992 "March of Christians," when Mobutu's troops killed and wounded dozens of unarmed peaceful demonstrators. We are concerned that against the backdrop described above, the government may seek to stop the march, including possibly through the use of force or other illegal tactics. The international community should reiterate both publicly and privately to Congolese government authorities that the right to assemble is a fundamental right enshrined in the Congolese constitution and urge Congolese authorities not to use force to impede peaceful protests.

We believe that Congo is at an important juncture in its efforts to move towards democracy. Timely and constructive international involvement is needed to help move events in a positive direction.

**Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network**

**European Network for Central Africa**

**Eastern Congo Initiative**

**Enough Project**

**Human Rights Watch**

**Humanity United**

**Open Society Foundations**