

March 14, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Office of the Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Supporting Youth & Civil Society for Peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Cc: Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield

Cc: Special Envoy Thomas Perriello

Dear Secretary Kerry,

As you know, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing renewed violence, corruption, and instability as a result of President Kabila's attempts to hang on to power – despite a clear constitutional mandate that he hold elections and step down. Even after at least 43 protesters were killed last year, peaceful opposition to the ruling regime has continued. The most recent iterations of these protests continued in February, with demonstrations and strikes in several major cities, including Kinshasa, Goma, and Bukavu. President Kabila and the Congolese government have increased repression, arresting many civil society members, youth, and political opposition activists.

As students, we are particularly concerned by the arrests of fellow youth activists, including Fred Bauma and Yves Mwakambala, who have been detained for a year for participating in community-led initiatives encouraging civic engagement by youth in Congo. Following *villes mortes* (dead cities) strikes on February 16, six peaceful youth activists from the civil society organization LUCHA were sentenced to two years in prison for “inciting public disorder.” They are among at least 30 political opposition members and supporters arrested across the country for participating in the *villes mortes*. In a country where the median age is 18, the youth voice must be heard, and activists protected.

Strong U.S. leadership in the coming weeks and months will be vital to support peaceful activists calling for much-needed democratic change and an end to repression and high-level corruption. We ask for your leadership in taking the following actions to make clear to President Kabila that he cannot extend his time in office:

- Employ targeted sanctions on President Kabila's inner circle, including travel bans and asset freezes.
- Support independent investigations into human rights violations and high-level corruption by local and international civil society groups and justice officials.
- Make a strong public statement urging the release of political prisoners, including youth activists from LUCHA and Filimbi, such as Jean-Marie Kalonji, Juvin Kombi, and Pascal Byumanine.

The Congolese people have demanded that President Kabila respect democracy and human rights, and the Congolese constitution demands that he respect predetermined term limits and step down.

We call on you to ensure American foreign policy reflects and supports the will of the people in order to prevent a wider crisis in Congo.

Sincerely,

Ellen Bresnick

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Middleton High School
Middleton, WI

Jacqui Johns

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Georgetown College
Georgetown, KY

Ruth Brown

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
University of Glasgow
Glasgow, UK

Clara Lee

Digital Communications Coordinator STAND
St. Olaf College
Northfield, MN

Casey Bush

Midwest Regional Organizer, STAND
Clark University
Worcester, MA

Madi McEwen

Campus Organizer Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
University at Buffalo
Buffalo, NY

Emily Collinson

University Fellow, Jewish World Watch
Communications Coordinator, STAND
American University
Washington, DC

Allison McNamara

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Illinois College
Jacksonville, IL

Annabel Collinson

University Fellow, Jewish World Watch
American University
Washington, DC

Enock Ntekereze

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY

Sarah Cox

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Antioch University
Keene, NH

Zachary Peloquin

Northeast Regional Organizer, STAND
Clark University
Worcester, MA

Ali Deutsch

University Fellow, Jewish World Watch
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA

Devota Pistol-Boesch

University Fellow, Jewish World Watch
Humboldt State University
Arcata, CA

Jane Dimnwaobi

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Boston University
Boston, MA

Marissa Sandgren

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Lewis & Clark College
Portland, OR

Jenna Dresner

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA

Moriah Schindler

University Fellow, Jewish World Watch
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA

Carly Fabian

University Fellow, Jewish World Watch
American University
Washington, DC

Ceci Steyn

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec

Kayla Finstein

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, TX

Bethany Vance

Southeast Regional Organizer, STAND
University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC

Francesca Freeman

Student Director, STAND
University of Chicago
Chicago, IL

Savannah Wooten

Campus Organizer, Conflict-Free Campus Initiative
University Fellow, Jewish World Watch
Education Coordinator, STAND
University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC

Timothy Hirschel-Burns

Mid-Atlantic Regional Organizer, STAND
Swarthmore College
Swarthmore, PA