



# World Relief Advocacy Brief

## Democratic Republic of Congo

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Proverbs 31:8*

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## OVERVIEW

The crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is considered the “**deadliest humanitarian crisis**” in the world. Over the last decade, over 5 million Congolese have died as a result of the widespread violence.

Although there was a peace agreement signed in January 2008 between the Congolese government and 23 rebel groups, the Eastern provinces of the DRC still see continued conflict and insecurity on a daily basis. The majority of conflict has its roots in inter-tribal and inter-ethnic tensions, but is also closely connected to struggles for power and control of resources. The country has a wealth of rich resources including gold, diamonds, copper and coltan, (among other minerals) which is used in many cell phones and laptop computers.

Most of the deaths are not a direct result of violence — but the violence and conflict have indirectly destroyed the infrastructure in this region and forced Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to live in deplorable conditions. It is virtually impossible to access health facilities, find clean water sources, and locate nutritious food.

Additionally, human rights are regularly violated. The situation in the DRC has been recognized as the worst



crisis of violence against women in the world. Rape is used as a weapon of war to destabilize entire communities. In some displacement camps, more than 70% of the women have been raped, with some being as young as three years old.

While the peace agreement in January 2008 was a positive step forward, the continued arming of rebel groups has created a situation in which there is on-going displacement and insecurity in the region. The Congolese people continue to fear attacks and women and children are especially vulnerable.



## WORLD RELIEF'S RESPONSE

**Conflict over the past decade has devastated the country. Over 1,000 needless deaths still occur each day due to malnutrition and infectious diseases. The agriculture cycles (on which 85% of the population depends) have been largely destroyed during inter-ethnic conflicts, resulting in widespread food shortages. Consequently, there is a large need for relief and development programs in the DRC.**

**World Relief (WR)** currently operates in North Kivu province (bordering Uganda and Rwanda) of the DRC. This is a rebel-controlled area with an IDP population of over 1 million. World Relief's immediate response is the distribution of emergency kits, including both food and non-food items, to internally displaced families.

World Relief has funded a seed and tool distribution project that reached more than 40,000 families to address the huge problem of food insecurity. World Relief also works closely with churches to rebuild schools which have allowed thousands of children to attend classes. Education is especially important for students who had

previously been displaced and are now returning to their local communities.

World Relief's established microfinance program, *Hekima*, provides affordable financial services to underserved communities. By providing small loans, we empower impoverished individuals to start small businesses in local markets.

In order to promote peace and reconciliation amidst conflict, World Relief has brought church leaders together to encourage dialogue and healing. These pastors have in turn called on their congregations to reconcile and work together to build houses for widows and orphans in their communities.

# POLICY + LEGISLATION



In coordination with the UN and other governments, the U.S. should increase its diplomatic efforts with the Congolese government to ensure full implementation of the signed peace agreements (Goma Jan. 2008 and Nairobi Nov. 2007).

The United States must also support a comprehensive plan to end gender-based violence in the DRC.

**The International Violence Against Women Act of 2007 (S.2279)** would coordinate U.S. government efforts concerning international women's issues. This bill would establish an advisory commission within the Department of State and direct the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to assist programs that prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. This coordinated strategy would ensure that commitment to end violence against women is incorporated into assis-

tance programs and training of foreign military.

**The Conflict Coltan and Cassiterite Act of 2008 (S.3058)** would prohibit the importation of products from the DRC that contain cassiterite and coltan (used in cell phones and computers), until the cessation of human rights violations associated with their extraction.

The United States must also be responsive to the humanitarian needs of the DRC. A commitment to increase funding for humanitarian assistance programs is key to meeting the needs of the Congolese people. This increased funding will also be critical for developing roads, bridges, and other critical infrastructure that are crucial to the overall development of the DRC.



*"There are few places on earth where the gap between humanitarian needs and available resources is as large - or as lethal."*

— Jan Egeland, UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs

## PRAYER

- Pray for the perseverance, health, and safety of the 1.2 million IDPs and 300,000 **refugees** fleeing violence. Pray for blessings upon the churches and host communities responding to the needs of IDPs.
- Pray for the **security** and increased protection of the Congolese. Pray for those who have lost loved ones and those who live in fear.
- Pray for the increased **involvement** of the international community — including increased funding for peacekeepers, humanitarian aid, and awareness.
- Pray for the safety and strength of **World Relief DRC staff**.
- Pray for full implementation of the January 2008 peace agreement. Pray that this would be a step forward towards immediate and long-term **peace** and security in this region.

## ACTION

- **Sign the World Relief petition** calling on the President to **increase** U.S. funding of humanitarian programs for the DRC. Urge him to bring human rights abuses in the Congo to the United Nations and international community's attention.
- **Contact** your Congressperson and urge them to support the International Violence Against Women Act which would coordinate U.S. response to violence against women or the Conflict Coltan and Cassiterite Act.
- **Raise awareness** in your community and church.
- Email World Relief to **receive updates** on the situation in the DRC or additional advocacy actions you can take at [advocacy@wr.org](mailto:advocacy@wr.org).
- **Give to World Relief's D.R. Congo program to meet the unmet needs of thousands of Congolese. Go to [www.wr.org/gettinginvolved/donate](http://www.wr.org/gettinginvolved/donate).**
- And most importantly, **PRAY**.

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