



June 12, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

RE: Atrocities and Human Rights Violations Occurring at the Hands of ISIS-Central Africa and M23 in The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dear Secretary Rubio,

By way of introduction, United for the Persecuted Coalition is an alliance of organizations and individuals united in their concern for Christians persecuted around the world because of their faith. We write regarding the numerous human rights violations presently occurring in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and to encourage the Department of State to continue its efforts for diplomatic intervention to contravene the barbaric attacks on innocent Congolese, taking every possible action to protect the Christians.

I. The Situation in the Congo

A. The Human Rights Violations of ISIS

While it has taken on different forms and names over the years, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been responsible for violent and destructive human rights violations and terror attacks for decades.¹ They were responsible for a mass shooting in Tunisia,² an attack in Paris that killed over 130 people,³ a suicide bombing at an international airport that killed 13 American

¹ Jason Hanna, *Here's How ISIS Was Really Founded*, CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/12/middleeast/here-is-how-isis-began/index.html> (Aug. 13, 2016).

² *Tunisia Attack: What Happened*, BBC (Feb. 1, 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33304897>.

³ *Paris Attacks: What Happened on the Night*, BBC (Dec. 9, 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34818994>.

servicemembers and roughly 170 Afghan citizens,⁴ and a suicide bombing in Iran killing 84 people,⁵ and of course, the innumerable genocidal atrocities that were carried out by ISIS against Christians in Iraq and Syria.⁶ They have been responsible for numerous similar attacks in Europe, the Middle East, and the African continent. The very recent slaughter of pilgrims near Kashmir bears the hallmarks of ISIS.⁷ The list of ISIS' atrocities worldwide is obviously much, much longer.

In recent years, ISIS has turned its sights to the DRC. The Allied Defence Forces (ADF), a pre-existing Muslim extremist militant group in the DRC, has, by training, integration, and propaganda from ISIS, become the DRC chapter for the Islamic State in Central Africa Province (ISCAP).⁸ ADF activity in the DRC has increasingly featured in ISIS propaganda since 2019.⁹ There is evidence of financial ties and ADF integration of ISIS methods and extreme jihadist beliefs.¹⁰ Between 2018 and July 2024, ISIS claimed responsibility for ADF attacks that caused over 8,000 fatalities in the DRC, marking ADF as one of the deadliest extremist groups in the region.¹¹ Indeed, ISIS has claimed that "soldiers of the caliphate" are present in the DRC.¹²

The ADF/ISIS, as a part of the Islamic State, makes a point to target civilians and especially prioritizes Christian believers in the DRC.¹³ In rejecting non-aggression pact with another insurgent group in 2024, ADF/ISIS leader Baluku reaffirmed his commitment to target "infidel" civilians in ADF/ISIS attacks.¹⁴ In April of 2024 in North Kivu, ADF/ISIS rebels killed over a

⁴ Matthew Olay, *Kabul Airport Attack Review Reaffirms Initial Findings, Identifies Attacker*, U.S. DEP'T OF DEF. NEWS (Apr. 15, 2024), <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3741245/kabul-airport-attack-review-reaffirms-initial-findings-identifies-attacker/>.

⁵ Jon Gambrell & Bassem Mroue, *Islamic State Group Claims Responsibility for Iran Suicide Bombings Killing at Least 84 People*, AP (Jan. 4, 2024) <https://apnews.com/article/iran-kerman-bombing-qassem-soleimani-mideast-tensions-3503bdbaa3d0815996e4010224bd5dcc>.

⁶ See European Center for Law and Justice, *Statement Requesting that the U.N. Recognise ISIS Atrocities Against Christians and Other Religious Minorities as Genocide and Take Immediate Appropriate Action*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/40/NGO/X (Feb. 11, 2019), http://media.aclj.org/pdf/3702_A_HRC_40_NGO_Sub_En.pdf.

⁷ Tippins Editorial Board, *Gaza 2.0 Erupts in Kashmir as Militants Execute Hindu Pilgrims in Cold Blood*, TIPP INSIGHTS (Apr. 23, 2025, 7:24 AM), <https://tippinsights.com/gaza-2-0-erupts-in-kashmir-as-militants-execute-hindu-pilgrims-in-cold-blood/?ref=tippinsights-newsletter>.

⁸ TARA CANDLAND ET AL., *THE ISLAMIC STATE IN CONGO 3* (George Washington Univ. 2021), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/The%20Islamic%20State%20in%20Congo%20English.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*; see also Dan Gooding, *What is ADF? Christian Beheadings Blamed on ISIS-Linked Terror Group*, NEWSWEEK (updated Feb. 24, 2025, 8:09 PM), <https://www.newsweek.com/drc-christian-beheadings-adf-isis-linked-terror-group-2035502> (The State Department said in its 2023 report that ADF reportedly funds itself in the DRC, through its control over mines and mineral exports in the region. Some funding has come from ISIS financing groups since around 2017.”).

¹¹ Pearl Matibe, *ISIS-DRC's Deadly Ascent: Emerging and Expanding Threat in Africa*, HOMELAND SEC. TODAY (Feb. 13, 2025), <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-drcs-deadly-ascent-emerging-and-expanding-threat-in-africa/>; TARA CANDLAND, *supra* note 8, at 4.

¹² TARA CANDLAND, *supra* note 8, at 3.

¹³ *Democratic Republic of the Congo 2023*, AMNESTY INT'L, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/report-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/> (last visited Apr. 16, 2025).

¹⁴ U.N. Security Council, *Midterm Report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, ¶ 29, U.N. Doc. S/2024/969 (Dec. 27, 2024), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/373/37/pdf/n2437337.pdf>.

dozen civilians, including children, and set a local hospital on fire.¹⁵ In January of this year, more than 30 civilians, predominantly Christians, were brutally killed by ADF/ISIS militants in the city of Muhangi and surrounding areas.¹⁶ On February 15, 2025, more than 70 Christian civilians were found beheaded inside a Protestant church in Kasanga, North Kivu. The victims, primarily women, children, and the elderly, had been abducted days earlier from the village of Mayba by ADF/ISIS militants.¹⁷ In March of this year, the ADF/ISIS continued to systematically target Christian communities in the DRC.¹⁸ At least 47 Christians were killed by ADF/ISIS in Ituri Province, with another mass killing occurring on March 5, where 19 believers were brutally slaughtered in the Sambuco and Makayana area.¹⁹ ISIS claimed this attack on all its media channels.²⁰ The persistent attacks by the ADF/ISIS have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the eastern DRC, contributing to the displacement of nearly 7 million people.

B. The Human Rights Violations of M23

The March 23 Movement (M23) has significantly escalated its activities in the DRC in recent years. Originally a dormant rebel group, M23 reemerged in 2022 and has since expanded its territorial control, leading to widespread violence and humanitarian crises.²¹ In 2024, several sources reported talk of co-operation between M23 and ADF to allow M23 to access ADF/ISIS territory.²² Although the ADF refused a non-aggression pact proposed by M23, this does not preclude other unknown agreements, as the negotiation channels are clearly open.²³ Despite past denials of cooperation, on the ground sources inform us that M23 may now soon be – if not already – in collaboration with the ADF/ISIS.²⁴

M23 has been effective in its insurgency. The group launched a swift and aggressive campaign, seizing major eastern cities including Goma (with a population of two million) and Bukavu.²⁵ “The group has tried to project an image of normalcy since arriving in Goma, but its forces have allegedly carried out summary executions, threatened civil society activists, and pushed out displaced people who had sought refuge in the city over recent years.”²⁶ The group has

¹⁵ Jean-Yves Kamale, *Islamic State-linked fighters kill at least a dozen civilians, including children, in eastern Congo*, AP (Apr. 3, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/congo-killings-rebels-islamic-state-847748c6b29442f5919d1079ae2e0076>.

¹⁶ Rodney Huhumuza, *Uganda's Military Says it has Captured a Commander of an Extremist Group Accused in Tourist Attack*, AP (Nov. 1, 2023), <https://apnews.com/article/d0c2a8eb1ff2faff48162adb29d84eb5>.

¹⁷ *70 Christians Found Beheaded in Church in DRC*, OPEN DOORS (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/drc-attack-church/>.

¹⁸ *Forty-Seven More D. R. Congo Christians Killed by Islamists*, BARNABAS AID (Mar. 11, 2025), <https://www.barnabasaid.org/us/news/forty-seven-more-d-r-congo-christians-killed-by-islamists/>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *The Resurgence and Alliances of the March 23 Movement*, ACLED (Mar. 23, 2025), <https://acleddata.com/2023/03/23/the-resurgence-and-alliances-of-the-march-23-movement-m23/>.

²² U.N. Security Council, *Midterm Report*, *supra* note 14, at ¶ 27.

²³ *See id.*, at ¶ 29.

²⁴ *Id.* at ¶ 27.

²⁵ Patricia Huon, *After the Fall of Goma and Bukavu, Where is DR Congo's M23 War Headed?*, THE NEW HUMANITARIAN (Mar. 20, 2025), <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/03/20/after-fall-goma-and-bukavu-where-dr-congos-m23-war-headed>.

²⁶ *Id.*

since entrenched itself by establishing local governance structures, projecting long-term control, and voicing ambitions that extend far beyond regional disputes.²⁷

Another major resource seized by M23 is the Rubaya mine northeast of Goma. The mine has “one of the world’s largest deposits of coltan — a mineral containing the ‘rare earth’ element tantalum, used in smartphones, knee replacements and explosive devices.”²⁸ It’s estimated that M23 collects at least \$800,000 of taxes every month just from its seizure of coltan production.²⁹ President Paul Kagame of Rwanda denies supporting the group, but the presence of thousands of Rwandan troops in Goma and throughout eastern Congo strongly suggests otherwise, according to numerous intelligence analysts, diplomats, researchers, and humanitarian workers familiar with the group or its operations.³⁰

The actions of M23 have created severe instability in the DRC by capturing major cities, displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians, and committing grave human rights abuses, including killings, looting, and intimidation. Their military offensives have left communities—particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children, and Christians—without essential services or protection. In areas like Bukavu and Goma, the summary executions and abuses targeting civilians, further threatens Christian communities among those devastated by the violence and forced displacement. This widespread destabilization has weakened government control and diverted security resources, creating a power vacuum that enables other armed groups, including ISIS, to expand their operations. The resulting chaos makes it easier for extremist groups like ADF/ISIS to carry out attacks on civilian populations, particularly Christians, and sustain their presence by exploiting the regional instability.

II. Coalition Contacts in the DRC

This human rights crisis is especially significant to our Coalition due to the harrowing stories we heard from survivors and the horrifically violent documentation of these atrocities that we ourselves have seen, pulled from ISIS social media platforms and documented by contacts on the ground in the DRC. Words alone cannot convey the savagery and brutality that Christians and others are facing at the hand of brutal terrorist and militant groups in the DRC. The summarized accounts below are first-hand experiences of people known to Camille and Esther Ntoto.

As referenced above, earlier this year, 70 Christians were beheaded by the ADF/ISIS. The rebel group entered the village, and people fled to the church, where a prayer meeting was taking place, for refuge. The rebels surrounded and invaded the church, killing everyone inside and using them as an example of the agenda to eradicate Christianity from the region.

Last month, two Christian Church elders from separate villages were tortured and burned alive, also used as an example of the ADF/ISIS agenda for the region.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Elian Peltier, *Wealth and Warfare Empower a Rwanda-Backed Militant Group in Congo*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar 20, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/20/world/africa/m23-goma-congo-rwanda.html>.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

Two weeks ago, a woman in charge of the women's Bible study in a local village was taken, beaten and raped by multiple ADF/ISIS soldiers. She was tortured by having sticks and rocks forced inside of her, and her bones broken and body parts dismembered – *all while being told by the soldiers that this was the fate of women who were Christians*. She was found, able to share her story, but soon died from her injuries.

There are many reports of individuals being caught by ADF/ISIS and asked their names. If their names are "Christian" names (e.g., David, Mary, Paul, etc.), they are executed on the spot. Others are forced to convert, and if they do not, they are murdered or tortured.

The Ntotos would welcome the opportunity to elaborate and provide more details concerning these accounts, and others, to State Department officials.

III. Request for American Intervention

Secretary Rubio, in recent months the United States, through you and others within the Trump Administration, has played a significant role in addressing the escalating tensions between Rwanda and the DRC. Earlier this year, you spoke with President Kagame to urge a ceasefire,³¹ and publicly condemned Rwanda's support of the M23 rebel group's offensive in eastern DRC.³² Not long after, the first substantive peace talks occurred in April after months of conflict.³³

The United States is also beginning negotiations for a potential multi-billion-dollar investment in the DRC's mineral sector, aiming to secure critical resources.³⁴ As part of those negotiations, the U.S. expressed a commitment to supporting peace efforts in eastern DRC, where M23 has entrenched itself.³⁵ The DRC's parliament is also preparing legislation to enhance the country's business climate, facilitating this potential trade agreement with the United States.³⁶

As the diplomatic relationship and the potential investment ties to the DRC grows, it presents an opportunity for the United States to take an affirmative step to address the human rights violations currently being perpetrated by ISIS and M23, and seemingly heretofore unchallenged. By leveraging its economic influence and diplomatic channels, the U.S. can help promote accountability, incentivize beneficial commerce, fill the current vacuum being exploited by ISIS, support peace initiatives, and provide targeted aid to victims of violence and displacement. Such engagement not only advances worthy humanitarian goals but also contributes to international stability, curbs the expansion of extremist groups acting against American interests, and also secures a region with which the U.S. is considering a significant financial investment. We write

³¹ Tammy Bruce, *Secretary Rubio's Call with Rwandan President Kagame*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE (Jan 28, 2025), https://www.state.gov/secretary-rubios-call-with-rwandan-president-kagame/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

³² Rubio Presses President Kagame for Immediate Ceasefire in DR Congo, THE STANDARD (Jan. 29, 2025), <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/africa/article/2001510606/rubio-presses-president-kagame-for-immediate-ceasefire-in-dr-congo>.

³³ Congo, M23 Rebels Hold First Talks After Months of Conflict, REUTERS (Apr. 5, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-m23-rebels-hold-first-talks-after-months-conflict-2025-04-05/>

³⁴ Ange Adihe Kasingo, *After Tariffs, US Dangles Billions of Dollars in Congo Mineral Investment*, REUTERS (Apr. 3, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/after-tariffs-us-dangles-billions-dollars-congo-mineral-investment-2025-04-03/>

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

urging you and your Department to take advantage of this opportunity, and take that affirmative step towards greater peace in the DRC region.

We appreciate the opportunity to address this critical need for action in order to protect the lives of innocent Congolese and to provide aid to the victims of the horrific atrocities that are being carried out against Christians and others in the DRC.

We invite you or your staff to meet with us and the Ntotos in person and are happy to facilitate such a meeting.

We stand ready to assist however possible.

Very respectfully,

**AMERICAN CENTER FOR
LAW & JUSTICE**

**THE CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL
ACTION CONFERENCE**

AFRICA NEW DAY INC.

CHRISTIAN DEFENSE COALITION

KINGDOM MISSION SOCIETY

THE REMEMBRANCE SOCIETY