



Together - Building the Church

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Update on D.R. Congo - August 2009

Welcome to our latest Congo update and especial thanks to those who have recently signed our Congo petition. We envisage the next update being in our WINDOW magazine in October.



News of the Fighting

The misery of the people of eastern DR Congo continues unabated. Despite the fact that one armed group (CDNP) has now been absorbed into the Congolese national army, there are many other groups still bringing death.

Congo's troubles intensify. In addition to the longstanding fighting in North Kivu, there has been an incursion by the Lord's Resistance Army into Orientale Province. 1250 civilians have been killed and 1500 more abducted. A militia group, the FPRI is also killing civilians in Ituri province. Unable to cope, the Congo National Army has invited the armed forces of Uganda, Rwanda, southern Sudan and Angola to help. This means many more men with guns in Congo.

In North Kivu in April, 255 houses were burned by the FDLR in Luofu and 90 at Kasiki. In June, over 100 houses were burned in Kanyabayonga, 110 miles north of Goma. UN peacekeepers and Congolese Army forces in the area **did nothing** to protect civilians. Many civilians spend the night in the bush instead of in their homes, for fear of massacre.

A major upsurge of fighting in South Kivu has recently displaced over 536,000 refugees, with widespread reports of houses burned, torture, rape and kidnappings by the FDLR militia.

The Congolese Army is part of the problem. Many Congolese soldiers are former militiamen, and are often very reluctant to pursue their former colleagues. In June, soldiers who had not been paid for six months fired on a UN base 60 miles north-west of Goma, because of their anger and frustration.

The fighting has also put up food prices – for staples such as rice, cassava, corn, sugar, fish and charcoal, making everyday life even more difficult.

As if that were not enough to contend with, Nyamulagira and Nyiragongo volcanoes in North Kivu are showing signs of imminent eruption. Nyiragongo last erupted in 2002 with devastating effect.

John Holmes, a senior UN official, says that the situation in eastern Congo is at least as bad as Darfur, but receives far less attention. Curiously, the only news agency to report his speech was Xinhua, the Chinese News Agency. The UN says that government donations to its humanitarian programmes for Congo and elsewhere in 2009 are only 27% of the sum needed.

Action Against Sexual Violence

Recent fighting has greatly increased the incidence of sexual violence as an act of war. HEAL Africa treated 1,590 sexual violence survivors in the first three months of 2009, a huge increase. They were also able to free 17 sex slaves. 38% of the survivors were found within 72 hours of the event, and 30% were under the age of 18. HEAL Africa has held 117 meetings in different villages to teach medical care for rape survivors.

In another hopeful sign, the Congolese government has set up mobile criminal tribunals and has begun to bring to trial those accused of sexual violence. In part, this is built upon the change to the constitution pushed through by Dr Jo Lusi and others. At the moment this activity is localised and the number of people caught is small. But it sends an important signal.

HEAL Africa News

The Wamama Simameni team (Women Stand up Together) just returned from a successful visit to the shelters for women throughout North Kivu. At these centres, desperate women are given help and counselling and taught skills to provide them with a livelihood.

Teams have recently visited the South Lubero region, teaching Safe Motherhood, and also encouraging churches and community groups to develop Nehemiah Committees to tackle local needs together.

There have been training courses for doctors in paediatric emergencies and medical ethics, and three courses for pastors, chaplains and Christian counsellors. The training of orthopaedic officers and medical technicians continues.



Dr Bitwe has returned from Belgium with his PhD in Paediatrics and Dr. Masoda has been recruited in the Family Medicine programme.

Partial customs exemption has been granted for a container of medical goods from Canada and of laboratory equipment from Australia.

The hospital is always very busy, with new patients arriving daily. More and more outreach teams are being sent to help outlying regions.

Petition News

Many people continue to sign the petition. As this update is written hundreds of people are signing each week at 'New Wine' in Shepton Mallet. We have received replies from many MP's to whom our supporters have written, asking them to take note of the needs of Congo.

We have also asked people to be aware of the illegal use by western companies of minerals looted from Congo. The campaigning organisation Global Watch has accused several British companies in involvement in illegal tin mining, which funds the fighting groups. The companies deny this, saying that since July 1st an industry-wide initiative has started to trace the source of their raw materials. Your concern is helping to change attitudes and starve the war of money for weapons.

URGENT NEED

For a long time, the World Food Programme has been providing the daily nutrition needs of patients at HEAL Africa hospital in Goma.

From the end of September, they will no longer be able to do so, because of a change of policy and the effects of the recession. This will seriously hamper HEAL Africa's work with victims of the war, victims of disease, maternity patients, children having orthopaedic surgery etc.

WorldShare has promised to try to help fill this huge gap. It costs £8 per week to feed each patient. We need to find at least £2000 per month to fill this gap.

CAN YOU HELP ? One-off gifts of any size are welcome— cheques payable to 'WorldShare - Congo', but *please* consider a standing order if you can, to help regularly. If you would prefer to set up a standing order online with your bank, please quote your surname and postcode as a reference. Please use our FREEPOST address for cheques and completed forms:

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