THE PEOPLE OF ITURI: CONFRONTING A FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE?

NORTHEASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
Violence and Its Consequences Since 17 December 2017
Statement on the Occasion of the Humanitarian Conference in Paris

Civil society representatives committed to peace and socio-humanitarian concerns in Ituri Province welcome the humanitarian conference held in France on 30 October 2025. We take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the President of the French Republic for this important initiative, at a time when several countries are confronting complex humanitarian crises arising from armed violence and/or natural disasters.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to face recurring security crises, particularly in its eastern regions, where armed violence has caused loss of life, human rights violations, and extensive internal and cross-border displacement of civilians.

Ituri Province, one of the 26 provinces of the DRC, has not been spared. Since 17 December 2017, it has faced severe and deadly violence attributed in this statement to members of CODECO, described by the author as a mystical-religious cooperative and armed movement. Civilians and security forces in Djugu Territory have been targeted. Reported consequences include large-scale killings, the burning of homes and other property, looting, sexual violence, the destruction of agricultural produce and essential community infrastructure, and mass displacement.

In response to these atrocities, military operations against armed groups have been accompanied by public denunciations and peaceful civic action, including marches and days of mourning organized by affected communities. Nevertheless, these initiatives have not sufficiently reduced the suffering of innocent civilians.

Following the violence in Djugu, repeated incursions attributed to CODECO spread to the neighboring territories of Mahagi and Irumu. Approximately three years later, groups describing themselves as self-defence forces emerged under various names, including MAPI, ZAIRE, ZAIRE MAZEMBE and ZAIRE JAMUKULABATU, reportedly formed within affected communities in response to the attacks.

During his first official visit to Ituri on 2 July 2019, the President of the Republic publicly condemned the grave security and humanitarian situation. Following an assessment, including a visit to Djugu Territory, he described the violence as an attempted genocide and as a means of destabilizing the authorities in Kinshasa.

While awaiting justice, we acknowledge the efforts of the Congolese authorities to secure recognition of the atrocities committed in the country. We also express appreciation for the President’s public acknowledgement of the gravity of the crimes committed against civilians by CODECO militiamen and for continued support of initiatives aimed at restoring peace in Ituri.

In January 2020, a report of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office characterized atrocities attributed to CODECO militiamen as war crimes and crimes of genocide, as described in the source statement. The author further maintains that the majority of victims were members of the Hema community. These characterizations are reproduced here as claims made in the original statement and are not independently adjudicated in this translation.

Despite these denunciations and subsequent reporting, killings and other grave acts of violence against displaced persons, returnees and other civilians reportedly continued over the following

five years, notwithstanding the DRC's status as a state governed by law and a United Nations member, and the substantial presence of MONUSCO personnel in Ituri since 1999.

We therefore urge that the humanitarian situation in Ituri receive particular attention from the DRC and the international community. The crisis has too often received limited media coverage and appears not to have attracted attention commensurate with its severity. This appeal is addressed to participants in the present high-level humanitarian discussions, in the hope that they will act in the interests of peace in the DRC and, in particular, Ituri Province.

Since the beginning of these atrocities, thousands of human rights violations have reportedly been committed by armed groups operating in Ituri. Published reports have repeatedly identified CODECO militiamen, ADF elements and their allies among the principal perpetrators of deadly violence and insecurity.

Illustrative incidents and patterns of reported violence

- Massacres of displaced persons, including victims reportedly killed with bladed weapons or firearms and others burned alive in displacement sites in Djugu and Irumu. The statement refers to approximately ten attacks on internally displaced persons' sites since 2017, attributed to CODECO and ADF fighters, with significant fatalities, serious injuries and material damage. Such sites should be protected civilian spaces.
- On 16 February 2024, 15 persons were reportedly abducted, tortured, bound and buried alive by CODECO militiamen at Tali Singo in Djugu Territory; the statement characterizes this as an isolated and inhumane act in the twenty-first century.
- Killings attributed to ADF fighters and their allies in Irumu and Mambasa, including an attack on civilians gathered for prayer at the Catholic parish in Komanda. The statement reports more than 40 deaths and serious injuries during the night of 26–27 July 2025.
- Repeated attacks on displaced persons working in fields or travelling to and from them, including killings, abductions, village looting and ambushes attributed to CODECO militiamen in Djugu Territory.
- Profanation of Catholic parishes in the Diocese of Bunia, including Jiba and Pkandroma, reportedly closed since 2024 in Djugu, thereby restricting worshippers' constitutional freedom of religion. On 21 July 2025, the parish church in Lopa was reportedly desecrated, with sacred objects, a Marian shrine and liturgical vestments thrown to the ground. These incidents raise serious concerns regarding respect for religious freedom and the protection of places of worship.
- Extremely grave acts reportedly committed by local and foreign armed groups in Ituri, including cannibalism, throat-cutting, the disembowelment of pregnant women, the mutilation of bodies, the killing and dismemberment of infants, the insertion of sharp objects into victims' bodies, and torture preceding death.

Against the backdrop of persistent insecurity, the emergence in 2025 of the Convention for the Popular Revolution (CRP) has also been observed. The statement expresses concern that this development may further complicate peace efforts and worsen the humanitarian situation, noting reports of clashes between CRP members and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC).

APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DRC, HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS AND DONORS

Recognizing the primary responsibility of Congolese authorities to protect and assist the population, we recall the humanitarian principle that the competent authorities bear the primary duty to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to people within their territory. We also refer to the frameworks governing cooperation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and United Nations humanitarian agencies. In this spirit, we respectfully submit the following appeals:

- We call upon the Government of the Republic to establish peace by holding all armed groups that obstruct peace processes accountable, while providing displaced persons and returnees with both food and essential non-food assistance. Such immediate support is vital to alleviating their suffering. These populations are dispersed across dozens of internally displaced persons' sites under humanitarian coordination, other sites not yet integrated into that system, and host families throughout the province.
- We urge the Government to adopt a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to resolving the conflict in Ituri, drawing upon the expertise of historians, theologians and other religious leaders, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, agronomists, psychologists, political scientists, economists, legal scholars, and other peace-minded individuals with a deep understanding of the province. The crimes committed by armed groups are exceptionally serious and require a correspondingly comprehensive response.
- We express concern that some researchers, political figures, institutions and organizations, through public statements or written accounts, may contribute to the distortion of Ituri's history and the context of the atrocities. Overreliance on political explanations, without due consideration of other essential dimensions, risks perpetuating the conflict in different forms.
- We encourage all humanitarian partners of the Government to maintain their assistance despite the difficult security environment. The Ituri crisis is complex and distinctive, including in how humanitarian urgency is understood and addressed.
- We call upon donors to advocate for peace and allocate adequate resources to meet the diverse humanitarian needs of displaced persons and returnees. These include food security, shelter, healthcare, education, protection, nutrition and essential household items. Sufficient funding would also enable additional displacement sites to be incorporated into established humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

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ITURI PROVINCE

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Translation note: This diplomatic rendering faithfully presents the author's allegations, descriptions and appeals without treating disputed legal or historical characterizations as independently verified findings. The original document is dated October 2025.