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Stability. Security. Peace. : Applying Human Rights and Humanitarian Law to solve Food Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Today alone approximately 1,152 Women will be raped and beaten in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). About 25% of those women will be sold to a brothel (a prostitution home). Nearly 70% percent of those women raped will contract the HIV virus. Almost every one of those women don't have access to proper food and nutrition as they should.¹ As of 2010, the DRC contains the highest percent of hungry people than any other country in the world. The country was also named one of the worst human rights offenders according to the Human Rights Risk Atlas 2014, and the most dangerous country for women to live in.² The correlation between the Congo's food security and human rights issues are evident.

The endearment an average individual has to go under in the Democratic Republic of Congo would seem nearly unbearable to a first world citizen. The Democratic Republic of Congo is comprised of nearly 66.5 million people and 253 different ethnic groups. Nearly two-thirds of the population resides in a rural area. Over half the country is considered to be below the poverty line. There are a few select individuals whom are considered "well off" other than the individuals who are a part of the government or political groups. Homes in the Democratic Republic of Congo are comprised of mud bricks, metal shrapnel, and a thatched metal roof. Earlier than the crack of dawn the fortunate children (usually male), walk miles to receive their education. The Women walk miles in the scorching heat to arrive at the nearest water system. There they retrieve a sufficient amount of water for the day and proceed home. Most fortunate families in the DRC practice subsistence agriculture, or self sufficient farming. The principle crops produced on these farms include cassava manioc, corn, tubers, and sorghum.³

The Democratic Republic of Congo has great potential as an agricultural wonderland. Along with being located on the Congo River Basin, it contains nearly 25% of the world's rain forest. The Congo Rain Forest is the second largest rainforest in the world stretching over 700,000 miles abundant with resources.⁴ The Congo rain forest has enough resources to potentially feed the entire population of the DRC, but due to human rights violations, the citizens suffer. Only 2.3% of land in the Democratic Republic of Congo is arable. The DRC is on a basin-shaped plateau surrounded by rainforests and various rivers, with dense grasslands in the south. Several African countries border this country such as Rwanda, Angola, Burundi, Republic of Central Africa, and Zambia. The DRC has access to the Atlantic Ocean by a narrow strip of land on the North bank of the Congo River.⁵

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the climate is primarily equatorial and tropical, but it experiences various climates throughout different regions. This is due to the fact it straddles right

¹ "Stop Rape in Democratic Republic of Congo." *Stop Rape in Conflict*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

² "Democratic Republic of Congo." *Democratic Republic of Congo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 June 2014.

³ "Food & Daily Life." *Our Africa*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 June 2014.

⁴ "Geography of the Democratic Republic of the Congo." *Princeton University*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

⁵ "Geography and Map of the Democratic Republic of the Congo." *Geography and Map of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

on the equator. Near the river basin, temperatures can reach over 100° Fahrenheit on average with approximately 7% humidity. The Congo also experiences about 800 mm to 2,000 mm of rainfall each year. The excessive rainfall and humidity is ideal for tropical rainforests, but many subsistence farmers struggle to produce high agricultural yields on a standard farm. This climate is ideal for the Congo's main crop, cassava.⁶ Besides the Congo's problem with excessive rainfall and humidity, they also struggle with major food security issues. Still recovering with years of political upheaval and war, the Democratic Republic of Congo faces numerous humanitarian challenges. Mortality rates among children have sky rocketed over the past decade. With the worst food security status in South Africa, over 25% percent of children are malnourished and aren't expected to exceed the age of five. Over 70% percent of the population lack access to an adequate food supply, and 6.4 million people are considered to be in a food security and livelihood crisis. Ninety percent of arable land in the DRC is not being cultivated due to government insecurity preventing access to these fields. Sixty-one percent of families are struggling to keep themselves fed and secure. When families aren't able to produce enough nutritional crop for consumption they usually produce cassava. Cassava isn't very nutritious and does not provide enough vitamins, especially vitamin A for pregnant women. When the Congolese people do have a successful farm, rebellious groups such as the M23 (March 23rd Movement group) will go in and raid all of their resources and kidnap women. Providing for one's self in the DRC is extremely difficult.⁷

Without adequate access to food or farmland, the amount of children you have indicates wealth. Many families have up to ten children to help in family agricultural production. Most men take leadership roles in political, economic, and religious institutions. The treatment of a woman in the Democratic Republic of Congo depends on her racial background and environment. Women in lower-class urban areas have substantially fewer rights compared to their rural counterparts. Women in rural areas are dependent on their husbands, but can acquire independence by gardening, making crafts, and preparing meals for their families. These women spend many hours working.⁸ As a woman it is highly encouraged to marry. Any woman that is not wedded is automatically considered a prostitute. Children generally are ranked along with women on the social ladder. Children learn the role of their parents. Many female children are killed at birth or sold to a brothel because they are considered a burden upon the family.⁹ The practice of gender based infant homicide is more prevalent in urban areas because rural women can work and be useful in agriculture. In many unfortunate cases some young male children are recruited as child soldiers by rebellious groups.

Commonly referred to as "The AIDS and Rape Capital of the World," the Democratic Republic of Congo has extensive health concerns, even outside of the HIV/AIDS virus. Over half of the population doesn't have access to basic healthcare. The health care system in the DRC is an utmost disaster due to the country's large population, poorly trained health administrators, and lack of investment in health care facilities. With millions of people experiencing random acts of violence, beatings, and rape, basic health care seems like a basic necessity. Diseases spread rapidly throughout the country. There are over a million reported cases of the HIV/AIDS virus in

⁶ "Congo, Democratic Republic of the." *Climate Information for Congo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

⁷ "Agriculture and Food Security." *U.S. Agency for International Development*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

⁸ "The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *EInternational Relations*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

⁹ "The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *EInternational Relations*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

the DRC along with thousands of unreported cases.¹⁰ Many other epidemics are prevalent among citizens including Malaria, the Measles, and Cholera outbreaks. Only 12% percent of women in the DRC are receiving proper medication for HIV, and 95% percent of women do not have access to treatment to prevent the spread of AIDS to their unborn child. "It's really heart-breaking to see. I see women and children coming into the clinic in a coma state barely breathing. It's sad because all of these diseases could have been prevented with inexpensive medication. The real problem isn't the diseases, the real problem is human rights conflicts," -Dr. on MSF (global organization committed to improving healthcare in underprivileged countries) staff.¹¹

With one-hundred years of war and horror, the Democratic Republic of Congo has suffered more than any other country in the world. The country is filled with conflict. This conflict was all fueled by other countries desires for the Congo's resources. The Congo was first settled more than 80,000 years ago. In 1885 the Congo was colonized by the Belgium government. The Belgium seized Congo from King Leopold. This was due to widespread brutal murder and torcher on the rubber plantations. The Belgian created large commercial farms for livestock and other crops as well as mined for resources such as cobalt.¹²In the 1950's political parties began to out rule the central government. The leading party, Parti Solidaire Africain, pressured for immediate independence. Innocent people were being murdered and raped. Riots filled the streets, and violence was taken upon Belgian forces. In 1960 Belgium finally declared the Congo a free state. Although the Congo was considered "independent," it still faced many safety problems because extremist groups were overpowering the central government. The Congo's government today is labeled as a "Democratic Republic," but it far from that. Although it is claimed that citizens have say in legislation, they rarely do. Due to manipulation of the Congo in previous years, their central government is small and highly dysfunctional. The government is unable to send state control throughout the country. Lack of Basic government control such as defense and security threaten human rights throughout the whole DRC.¹³

One of the first major human rights scare in the Democratic Republic of Congo began in 1994 with the Rwandan genocide just across the border. Over one a half million refuges fled to the eastern DRC. Hutu extremists groups began attacking Rwandan and Congo territories. At the time leader Mobutu Sese Seko did absolutely nothing to assist Rwanda in stopping these gruesome raids. Innocent citizens were being brutally murdered and forced out of their territories. When human rights were being violated in the nineties, virtually nothing was done. It wasn't until 2009 that the DRC decided to finally take action. At that time the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a treaty allowing Rwandan troops to pursue any Hutu extremist groups that crossed the eastern border. Three years later Bosco, Ntaganda started a Pro-Rwandan rebel group known as the March twenty-third movement. This group has stated that there goal was to overthrow the Democratic Republic of Congo government. They also find success in neglecting the basic human rights of the Congo people. Several Rwandan groups took a wrongful advantage of this treaty to go into the DRC and overthrow the government.¹⁴These extremist groups are detrimental to the human rights conditions in the DRC. Although the government has realization of the human rights violations, they simply can't do anything about it. Their government simply isn't strong enough to combat these extremist groups. Although the United Nations has some evidence of

¹⁰ Health, Usaid/global. *Democratic Republic of Congo HIV/AIDS Country Profile* (n.d.): n. pag. Web.

¹¹ "Democratic Republic of Congo." *MSF USA*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

¹² Geography." *Infoplease*. Infoplease, n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

¹³ News, CBC. "The Democratic Republic of Congo: A Brief History." *CBCnews*. CBC/Radio Canada, 21 Nov. 2008. Web. 04 June 2014.

¹⁴ "Democratic Republic of Congo." *Democratic Republic of Congo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

these extremists groups, the United Nations cannot step in because there is not enough evidence supporting that Rwanda is truly sponsoring these extremists groups. The United Nations also does not want to take action because they believe that if the DRC concludes that the Rwanda is supporting this rebel movement, another pan African-war will occur. Although the government acknowledges that its security force supports one of the main groups of offenders, they have not partaken in security reforms.¹⁵

The average Congolese citizen has little to no access to health care. When a citizen is diagnosed with an epidemic, 70.82% of the time it is fatal. There are many health care issues within the country that must be addressed in order to assure the quality of life for these people. There are approximately 19,000 maternal deaths annually. There are also less than one health professional for every 1,000 people. If more people were trained more adequately as health professionals, the maternal mortality rate would decrease. As the rape capitol of the world, the Democratic Republic of Congo struggles with enormous amounts of sexual violence. Forty percent of women and twenty-seven percent of men have experienced sexual violence by armed groups within their homes. These people don't have access to an immediate care center after these occurrences. Rape often leaves survivors injured, with a sexually transmitted disease and traumatized.¹⁶ These citizens have no access to HIV post-exposure prophylaxis, counseling, and contraception. The shortage of health care facilities and low awareness leave victims unaware of their HIV status. Out of 350,000 people who have the HIV virus, only 12.8% are being treated. There is only one machine within the entire country that can test early infant diagnosis. Only 5.8% of women receive prevention methods to prevent the transmission of HIV, and the transmission rate is 37%. More diagnostic HIV tests are needed in order to stop the spreading of these fatal disease. When health care facilities are in the country, many lack refrigeration and electricity. Refrigeration is essential to preserving vaccinations. Thirty percent of all children in the country do not have proper access to immunization even though it costs less than one dollar per immunization. Not enough money is spent investing in these facilities. Many Diarrheal Diseases are caused by un-sanitized drinking water. The effects of these diseases show up rapidly and can kill a person within hours. Many of the people inflicted with disease die due to no access to immediate health care centers.¹⁷ Having basic health care is basic human right denied to many people of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Congo has the worst per capita income in the world. The government continues to struggle with income, violence, poverty, and system corruption. Surprisingly Congo's economy is rapidly growing around six and a half percent each year, but it isn't merely enough to sustain its people. Its gross domestic product is around 25 billion dollars. That only accounts for a total production of just 231 dollars per year.¹⁸ The Congo doesn't have an adequate amount of money to uphold a proper defense system. The citizens of the Congo have no protection from rebellious groups. They also do not have a sufficient amount of money to invest in new agricultural methods in order to obtain the many resources the country holds. Without proper income, the citizens are living in a constant fear of hunger and rebellious extremists.¹⁹

¹⁵ "DRC Government 'Troubled' By M23 Recruitment." *VOA*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

¹⁶ "Accessible Health Care for Pregnant Women & Newborns in Rural DRC." *Accessible Health Care in DRC*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

¹⁷ "Health Information for Travelers to Democratic Republic of the Congo Traveler View." *Health Information for Travelers to Democratic Republic of the Congo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 June 2014.

¹⁸ "Republic of Congo." *Economy: Population, GDP, Inflation, Business, Trade, FDI, Corruption*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

¹⁹ "Congo, Democratic Republic." - *African Economic Outlook*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

The Democratic Republic of Congo took fought in Africa's First World War. The aftermath of this war was devastating. Over five million people were dead, and all infrastructure was destroyed after the fighting. Because all the infrastructure was destroyed, the people's access to water was greatly diminished. Many of the Congolese people have died from sicknesses associated with lack of water such as diarrhea and malaria. Because the DRC has no funds, it cannot improve its infrastructure and water-pumping systems. Over thirty-one percent of citizens do not receive water from their towns and villages. This means they may use alterative and potentially dangerous sources to satisfy their water needs.²⁰ Many Citizens to retrieve their water from local streams and ponds. A local man Romaldo states: "We've become used to drinking spring water because it is natural. It is not often associated with chemicals." Unfortunately Romaldo is wrong. The people are uneducated about their own water sources. According to the water project, many of the springs contain chemicals and bacteria. The Congolese can purchase purified water for a dollar a day, but that is unaffordable considered most people in the Congo only make around two dollars a day. Water is everywhere in the DRC, but it's not safe to consume. One in ten deaths in the Congo are related to a disease associated with contaminated water. Less than half of the population have access to safe drinking water, and it will take years for them to meet global sanitation requirements. The Congolese have no other option but to drink the contaminated water.²¹

In 1994, the United Nations Security Council established MONUC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo). This enabled peacekeepers to use force to keep the civilians safe. In nineteen ninety-one they demanded that all armed forces in the Cong cease all violence. In two-thousand and twelve the UN established a neutral international force with four thousand men in the congo to ensure stability. With this resolution, violence has been slightly reduced. Around one-thousand child soldiers have been returned to their families. Some combats have been demobilized.²² Although this resolution helped, it only helped solve for a fraction of the human rights issues in the Congo and has already ended March thirty first of this year. The resolution was only temporary and did not help account for the thousands of women being kidnapped and sent to prostitution homes where they are deprived of their food and dignity. WHO, the World Health Agency, has established temporary clinics to help medicate those with HIV/AIDS. The International campaign to stop rape and gender violence has attempted to educate the people about the relationship between food security and human rights.²³

To solve for human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo, more international peace organizations must step in to protect the citizens. Peace organizations must make it a long term goal to ensure the safety of these individuals. The DRC must accept a new resolution to allow peace keeping forces freedom of action, both physical and political, to carry out its mandated tasks.²⁴ These peace keeping groups would implement and enforce their own humanitarian law to solve for human rights and gender violence. The solution is not to condone these activities, but to combat them. Peacekeeping organizations can assist in terminating illegal brothels as well as to help change the social fabric of the Congolese society to prevent rape. Education could also be

²⁰ "Water In Crisis - Spotlight Democratic Republic of Congo." *The Water Project*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

²¹ Puechguirbal, Nadine. "Women and War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." *Signs* 28.4 (2003): 1271-281. Web.

²² "United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC)." *UN News Center*. UN, n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

²³ "Democratic Republic of the Congo WHO Country Office." - *WHO*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.++++

²⁴ "About UN Peacekeeping." *About UN Peacekeeping*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

used to promote awareness of the human rights violations in the DRC. A light must be shed on the country's condition in order to gain international support. Force does not have to be taken. Many extremist groups do what they do in order to gain resources. A compromise could possibly be negotiated in order to create a fair distribution of resources. Another method could be to divide and conquer the groups. This involves establishing relationships with some of the members and creating a wedge between the members. When human rights are solved, the citizens will have more accessible nutrition, solving for food security. The DRC must also make security reform acts so they do not condone major rebellious groups.²⁵ These peacekeeping forces would promote peace, provide protection, punish perpetrators, promote prevention against sexual assaults, and attempt to disarm extremist groups.

There are several organizations which can contribute to solving the solution. The United Nations is an international organization founded in nineteen forty-five by fifty-one countries committed to obtaining international peace. This organization develops friendly relationships among nations and promotes social progress and human rights. Because this organization is one of the largest and best known for peacekeeping, it can surely help solve human rights in a largely populated country.²⁶ Human sex trafficking is also a large violation of human rights in the DRC. The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) could also help. This organization works internationally to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation in all forms. The Human Rights watch is the largest human rights organization. This organization could monitor the conditions in the DR of Congo to work closely with the peacekeeping forces. The International Justice Mission is an agency that rescues victims of violence and sexual exploitation. The World Health Organization (WHO) can help provide immunization and basic health human rights to these citizens. Human rights are a very large problem with different aspects. These organizations could help solve.²⁷

The Democratic Republic of Congo has completely disregarded the basic human rights of its citizens. Every single type of human violation occurs in this country. This includes killings, torture, rampant sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, unfair court proceedings, forced labor, recruitment of child soldiers, lack of basic civil liberties, gender violence, and so many other offenses against humanity.²⁸ Dehumanization is taking place. Rape is being used as a weapon by rebellious groups. Men, women, and children lack basic health care and nutrition. The United Nations entered and made an impact, but already ended their resolution. Organizations like WHO, and other small medical operations have went in and provided temporary care.²⁹ More must be done to solve the human rights issue.

Rape, Violence, and all other forms of human rights violations take place in the DRC. The central government isn't strong enough to protect its own people. It's time for the United Nations to step back into the picture. The progressive they made on human rights in the Congo was commendable, but not enough. More action and more organizations must take action in combating human rights violations and gender violence. The changes would be drastic.

²⁵ "The Third Side: What Do Peacekeepers Do? | Beyond Intractability." *The Third Side: What Do Peacekeepers Do? | Beyond Intractability*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

²⁶ "United Nations Peacekeeping." *UN News Center*. UN, n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

²⁷ "HumanTrafficking.org | United States of America: International Organizations." *HumanTrafficking.org | United States of America: International Organizations*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

²⁸ "Violence Against Women | RAISE Hope for Congo." *Violence Against Women | RAISE Hope for Congo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014

²⁹ "Fighting Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *Fighting Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 June 2014.

Thousands of recruited child soldiers would be returned to their families.³⁰ Hundreds of thousands of women would no longer have to participate in forced labor and prostitution. Families would gain better access to health care and nutrition. Rebellious groups would disarm and the terror would minimize, and the DRC government would make a security reform so they wouldn't support Rwandan groups such as the M23.³¹

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” This was stated in article one of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.³² It seems that this statement does not apply to the citizens in the Democratic Republic of Congo as it should. The biggest crime against humanity is taking place inside the boundaries of the DRC. Citizens of the DRC don't have access to proper food because of human rights violations. Citizens, especially women, are being deprived of basic nutritional needs. Women are being kidnapped and placed into prostitution homes where they'll be lucky if they eat once every three days. Children are being kidnapped from their families to become soldiers. Citizens are denied access to arable land. The Democratic Republic of Congo has enough resources to feed its people. It also has many other resources such as gold and cobalt that can be used to boost their economy.³³ With all these resources the question is: Why are the Congolese people starving? The answer is simple, but the solution may take years. Norman Borlaug once said: “Food is the moral right of all who are born in this world.” The Congolese people must gain their moral rights back. With peacekeeping organizations, stability, security, and peace can finally be ensured.

³⁰ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/monusco/>

³¹ Asadho, and Groupe Lotus. *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Taking a Stand on Security Sector Reform* (n.d.): n. pag. Web.

³² "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR, Declaration of Human Rights, Human Rights Declaration, Human Rights Charter, The Un and Human Rights." *UN News Center*. UN, n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

³³ "World Report 2013: Democratic Republic of Congo." *Human Rights Watch*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2014.

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