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February 19, 2010

The Honorable Christopher J. Dodd  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Fax: 202-224-1083

Dear Senator Dodd:

We write in support of the Congo Conflict Minerals Act (S. 891) and ask you to cosponsor the bill so that it moves quickly through the legislative process. This bill represents an important start and an opportunity to improve the lives of millions of people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by requiring the U.S. government to focus greater attention on the causes of the deadly conflict and the resulting dire humanitarian situation. The bill could help significantly reduce the levels of violence and increase respect for human rights in the eastern DRC.

USCCB recently received a letter from the National Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Democratic Republic of Congo (known by its French acronym CENCO) seeking our support for legislative initiatives to "fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources" in the DRC and expressing their deep gratitude to the Senate cosponsors of S. 891. As Bishop Nicolas Djomo Lola, President of CENCO, wrote:

For more than 10 years, CENCO has not ceased to point out in its statements and messages the relationship between the wars and recurring conflicts in the DR Congo and the illegal exploitation of natural resources. Likewise, it has always called for the various summits for peace, especially in the Eastern DRC, to address the root causes of these wars and conflicts, and not only their effects, in particular the widespread violations of human rights, rapes and sexual violence used as weapons of war, as well as corruption. ... It is necessary to highlight that the exploitation of natural resources is one of the causes, if not the main cause, of tragedy in Eastern Congo....

Recognizing the complex nature of the conflict in the eastern DRC and the Great Lakes region and out of solidarity with the Church in the DRC, we call on Congress and the Administration to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to support a peaceful resolution of the conflict. To this end, we respectfully request that the Senate strengthen S. 891 as it moves forward with additional provisions such as: auditing key mineral supply chains; denying entry into the United States of goods that contain metals that have been found to be derived from conflict minerals; and providing incentives for use of conflict-free minerals, for example, regulating labeling of products as "conflict mineral-free." We also recommend the bill include a sense of Congress that the U.S. State Department should expand its support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and strengthen local and U.S. agencies providing development assistance and humanitarian aid to the victims of the tragic conflict in the eastern region of the DRC.

Along with the Church and our partners in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we thank you for your commitment to peace and development in that violence-torn country.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard  
Bishop of Albany  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Ken Hackett  
President  
Catholic Relief Services