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THE PRIME MINISTER

21 November 2008

Dear Friends

Thank you for your letter of 21 November about the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Like you, I remain deeply concerned at the recent upsurge of fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the impact that this has had on the humanitarian situation. There is an urgent need for long term security in the region, supported by a political resolution of the long-standing differences in the Kivu region.

We have been closely engaged with efforts to achieve this. The Foreign Secretary and Lord Malloch Brown have both visited the region in the last month to urge the Rwandan and DRC Governments to cooperate constructively to re-energise efforts to bring about a political solution. We urged the UN Secretary General to appoint a high-level envoy, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who would be able to mediate between the various parties. We have increased our humanitarian assistance to the region in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of those directly affected by the recent fighting. And we have also worked closely with the UN to address the security situation.

We have looked closely at options for increased military assistance, and have concluded that creating a new force from scratch outside the existing UN structure would not be achievable quickly. This would take longer than reinforcement of MONUC. It would also open up a parallel command structure, complicating the situation further.

We have therefore focused our efforts on two things: making sure MONUC is effectively deployed, and that it has the additional capability it requires, as quickly as possible. We have lobbied the UN to redeploy MONUC's troops, and countries contributing troops to lift caveats to

allow this to happen. That process is well under way and will be complete by the end of November. 95% of its 17,000 troops are now stationed in eastern DRC. This has given it increased capacity to respond to developments on the ground. A better deployed MONUC is already working to ensure the security of the newly vacated zones and to act as a buffer between CNDP and FARDC. Peacekeepers have moved to occupy territory vacated by the CNDP in recent days.

We also co-sponsored UNSCR 1843, adopted on 20 November, which will allow MONUC to build up an additional 2,785 troops and 300 police. We have begun lobbying potential troop contributing countries to meet this requirement; and we are looking at additional technical and logistical support we can offer to MONUC/troop contributors (e.g. helping them get to DRC). We are ready to offer candidates to bolster the command and intelligence structures for MONUC, if requested.

While the EU maintains a battle group, this is designed to deploy rapidly to a new crisis where no international force is present. It is not a convenient way to generate additional forces to an existing mission. Some EU member states are already saying they may be able to send troops and would do so through the UN force.

The UK remains determined to bring stability to eastern DRC and will continue to work with the UN, partners in the region and the international community to bring this about.

Yours sincerely

Clinton