

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 10, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to follow up on an October 20, 2022, letter regarding the rebel group M23's troubling activities in and around the Democratic Republic of Congo. We remain concerned amid renewed reports of the group's use of child soldiers, and the consequences of such under the Child Soldier Prevention Act (P.L. 110-457).

Since 2021, M23 has launched sophisticated and deadly attacks against the Congolese government, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and civilians. Reports from the United Nations and human rights organizations indicate that M23 is receiving a regular supply of modern arms and munitions that allows its members to strike targets over long distances and execute precision fires against aircraft. These reports have found that the munitions and equipment have, in large part, come from the government of Rwanda. A United Nations report in December 2022 found that M23 fighters have been recruiting not only in occupied Congolese territory but also in Rwanda and Uganda. M23 also has used children as combatants, recruiting them under the false pretense of employment. While the annual Trafficking in Persons report, containing the list of the countries that support entities using child soldiers, is published annually, we believe this use of child soldiers requires more timely action.

Since the beginning of renewed hostilities, more than 500,000 people have been forced to flee their homes, with many civilian deaths. Reports of civilians being arbitrarily executed in front of their families, torture, forced conscription, and destruction of homes are just some of the horrors that M23 is inflicting on the people of the DRC. In December, massacres in the settlements of Kishishe and Bambo resulted in the deaths of at least 171 civilians and more than 20 children. Such reports come as M23 displays offensive capabilities more in line with a conventional army than a disorganized insurgent group. Its capabilities have enabled its members to overrun MONUSCO-supported Congolese-held positions and hold territory. Direct state support for M23 enables its reign of terror across the Eastern DRC. The United States must act to hold those that enable M23 accountable.

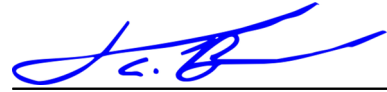
We welcome the imposition of further sanctions on M23 under the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 (P.L. 112-239) and on Rwanda and other state actors supporting M23 under the Child Soldier Prevention Act. We also request a full accounting of all assistance given to Rwanda since 2019.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We urge swift action to confront this crisis.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator