

*From the Office of
The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu
Cape Town, South Africa*

August 25, 2008

An Open Letter to his Excellency President Joseph Kabila,

I must commend you for all your accomplishments as President of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Your success has been tremendous in establishing peace and organizing the first ever democratic elections in the country. However, there are still challenges to be met today, and in the future, to ensure a healthy vibrant Congolese democracy. I am confident that you will be successful.

As you know, my country, South Africa, has been grappling to find a solution to the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is killing whole communities on our Continent. While we are now beginning to see some positive change for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, our failures have been in the policy of denial and avoidance that left millions to die. The changes that we are seeing have been achieved by the power of the people living and affected by HIV/AIDS unifying their voices through civil society and demanding their right to information, to health and to life. It is with this in mind that I would like to add my voice to the voices of civil society organizations in the DRC, like AJEDI-Ka/PES, who are seeking your commitment to end the silent storm of HIV/AIDS that is compounded by the effects of war and extreme poverty.

As you are aware, over 1.3 million people are living with HIV/AIDS in the DRC. More than 100,000 people have died of AIDS and more than 930,000 children have lost one or both parents to this preventable disease that, if not tackled directly by government policy, has the potential of killing millions. Yet, 95% of those needing anti-retroviral treatment are left without life saving drugs. Listening to the stories of people living with HIV/AIDS featured in the video “Awaiting Tomorrow” (produced by AJEDI-Ka/PES and WITNESS), I am reminded of the generation of South Africans that we have lost to this pandemic and the courageous survivors who stood up to demand action of us all. It is for this reason that I am compelled to urge you to turn the tide of this emerging crisis.

The slow progress towards universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support can only be increased by strong policy and practice and by prioritizing the issue at the governmental level. The Congolese government, supported by the international community, can comply with their international obligations to take all necessary measures to guarantee the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS, including the right to health and the right to information on prevention, testing and treatment and the promises made through the Millennium Development Goals. I respectfully urge you to ensure free HIV/AIDS testing, medical care and medication, including home based care, nutritional and psychological support to those living with HIV/AIDS; to carry out and become personally involved in nationwide outreach on testing and prevention particularly targeting women and youth; to implement awareness raising activities and legislation to

end discrimination against all affected persons, and to build the infrastructure critical to make medical assistance accessible.

Your Excellency President Kabila, with the hope of renewed democracy and peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, please learn from South Africa's mistakes and take action to halt the spread of this deadly disease now. My weight of support is behind you in this fight.

God Bless You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Desmond Tutu". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by several horizontal lines that suggest a flourish or the end of a signature.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu