

**Opening Remarks**  
**Chairman Donald M. Payne**  
**"The Great Lakes Region: Current Conditions and U.S. Policy"**  
**Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health**  
**Tuesday, May 25, 2010**  
**10:00AM in 2172 RHOB**

Good morning. Thank you for joining the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health for this important hearing entitled "Great Lakes Region: Current Conditions and U.S. Policy".

The Great Lakes region of central Africa is perhaps the richest, most verdant area of the continent. It is home to vast forest and wilderness areas, lush agricultural land, extensive mineral deposits, a wealth of biological diversity, and of course, thousands of lakes. This richness is undoubtedly what attracted King Leopold of Belgium to Congo. In his attempt to transform Belgium into an empire in the late 1800s, he remotely created a living nightmare in Congo based on the grotesquely violent oppression of native Congolese for the purposes of exporting Congo's rich natural resources to Europe. For decades the region's wealth washed ashore in ships at the port in Antwerp and Congo's loss became Leopold's and Belgium's gain.

As destructive as the rape of the Congo was on the country's natural resources, the impact on its people is immeasurable and still plays out today. Yet, its impact is still misunderstood and underestimated. As chairman of the Subcommittee, and a former history teacher, I believe we must understand the history of any region or people if we are to fully understand the present day situation. The roots of the instability and destruction of the Great Lakes region are found in Leopold's legacy. Now that we have that foundation, let me bring us up to recent history.

The Great Lakes region has been in crisis since the early 1990s, although conditions have improved in the past year. Shortly after the Rwandan genocide in 1994, millions of civilians and ex-combatants fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The former Rwandese armed forces launched an insurgency in late 1994 targeting the survivors of the Rwandan genocide. In May 1997, the Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), with the support of Rwanda and Uganda, marched into Kinshasa and ousted longtime dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.

Within one year, however, tensions between President Laurent Kabila and his Rwandan and Ugandan allies began to mount. In August 1998, open conflict erupted between Kabila and Congolese forces supported by Rwanda. Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe joined the fighting in support of Kabila, plunging the region once again into a major crisis.

In July 1999, at a summit in Lusaka, Zambia, the leaders of Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola signed a peace agreement. The signing of the peace

agreement, however, did not bring peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. Armed groups from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and DRC continue to target civilians and government forces in DRC and Rwanda. In 2008, Rwanda and DRC launched a joint military operation against these forces. The military operation severely weakened these armed groups. Nonetheless, the DRC continues to face insecurity and major humanitarian crisis, especially in Eastern Congo, fueled by a resource grab. The humanitarian crisis in Eastern Congo has captured the attention of thousands of Americans across the country. Rape and sexual violence are used as weapons of war in numbers that are simply unimaginable. In addition, the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony continues to wreak havoc through the region and into Sudan.

Beyond these security concerns, there are also issues of democracy and governance. Burundi and Rwanda face presidential elections this summer. President Kabila has called for a withdrawal of the UN Mission (MONUC) by 2011. Meanwhile, the DRC needs strong engagement from the international community to build institutions.

The United States continues to play a key role in an effort to bring about peace, stability, and development in the Great Lakes region. The purpose of today's hearing is to receive an update on a variety of issues facing the region and how U.S. policy efforts are addressing the major challenges that remain. To provide this insight, we are joined by a panel of two distinguished officials, Ambassador Johnnie Carson and Mr. Franklin Moore, whose full bios will be read following Member's opening statements. We thank you both for participating today. We had also planned a private panel, but due to traveling schedules of several of the witnesses, we will postpone that portion for a later date.

I now turn to Ranking Member Chris Smith of New Jersey for his opening remarks.