

The eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been devastated by war for 30 years now. The security situation has deteriorated even further since the resurgence of the M23 armed group in November 2021. This group occupies a significant part of North Kivu Province with the support and direct involvement of the Rwandan army, as documented by the United Nations.

This war of aggression is committed in flagrant violation of the international law. It aims to terrorize the population, who live in extreme poverty in these regions where the soil abounds in natural resources. The fightings force them to either move or subjugate themselves while the groups monopolize the control of the strategic minerals.

The intensification of fighting is accompanied by serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law. For example, there is recruitment and use of children as soldiers or the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon of war. All this is happening in a climate of widespread impunity that fuels the repetition of those serious crimes.

This new spike in violence and instability has led to a considerable deterioration in the already dramatic humanitarian situation.

Over 25 million people suffer from food insecurity, equivalent to a quarter of the Congolese population.

The number of internally displaced people exceeds 7 million, far exceeding the population of Norway. The majority of the Congolese displaced are women and children surviving in inhumane conditions in overcrowded camps, which are regularly targeted by belligerents.

Cases of sexual and gender-based violence are also reaching alarming levels. According to the UN, over 90,000 cases were reported for the year 2023 in North Kivu, and 10,400 cases were reported in the DRC in January 2024 alone!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you invited me to speak at the University of South-East Norway, I wanted first and foremost to draw your attention to the dramatic situation in my country and the profound suffering endured by the Congolese people.

I'd like to thank the Deans of the Faculties who have chosen our cause for the University's first honorary doctorate. You are hereby expressing your wish to shed light on one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes of modern times, yet one that is on the list of international neglect.

Every year, the Norwegian Refugee Council ranks the most neglected displacement crises in the world, and the DRC regularly comes in as number one.

This ranking is based on three criteria: 1. lack of international political will ; 2. Lack of international aid ; and 3. Lack of media interest.

1. While the conflict ravaging the DRC is the deadliest since the Second World War, the last serious initiative to end the conflict and resolve the root causes of the violence dates back to

February 2013. That was when the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement for Peace, Cooperation and Security was signed. Referred to as the "Accord of Hope," the commitments made under this peace agreement have never been implemented due to international community fatigue, the bad faith of regional leaders and the deficit of leadership in the DRC.

More recently, the so-called Luanda and Nairobi processes, which were supposed to silence the guns in Kivu, have been plunged into a total diplomatic stalemate.

Moreover, it was against this backdrop of Rwandan aggression against the DRC, the peak of the crisis and the risk of a regional conflagration that the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC began its disengagement from the country, with no plan in sight to end the crisis.

Finally, the international community, so inclined in certain situations to decide on and apply political and economic sanctions against states that violate the territorial integrity of their neighbors, limits itself to empty words and perfunctory condemnations of Rwanda's expansionist ambitions.

The wounded communities of Eastern Congo are paying a very heavy price for the consequences of this policy of double standards and selective indignation.

2. The inadequacy of humanitarian assistance in the DRC plunges us into a profound crisis of our humanity. While the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan was launched with the aim of raising \$2.6 billion to provide adequate responses, by March only 14.2% had been funded by the donor community.

This under-funding of aid led the World Food Program to deplore in February that, for lack of sufficient resources, its assistance to displaced persons in eastern Congo would be limited.

This shortage of funds means that humanitarians have to set priorities, which means that millions of Congolese will be condemned to starvation or death, while in other displacement crises, such as Ukraine, donors have no shortage of resources to fund even the feeding of displaced people's pets.

3. Lack of media interest. We're bombarded every day with the latest developments in the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, but who keeps up with the news from Africa's Great Lakes region, where the number of dead, displaced and raped women runs into the millions?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is in the context of this forgotten and neglected crisis that we continue our work at the Panzi Hospital and Foundation.

For the past 25 years, we have been treating the consequences of rape and conflict-related sexual violence. To best meet the needs of victims, we have implemented a care strategy based on 4 pillars: medical-surgical, psychological, socio-economic and legal.

This one-stop-shop model aims to rehabilitate survivors and transform their suffering into strength, and their pain into power. Once we have dealt with their physical and psychological traumas, we accompany them on the road to socio-economic reintegration and the quest for

justice. Our final goal is that they can become autonomous and regain their place in society with dignity.

Our responsibility cannot be limited to repairing the consequences of violence. Our patients' greatest aspiration is the return of peace. This is why we are lobbying national, regional and international bodies to address the root causes of instability and break the vicious cycle of violence and impunity. This is what we mean by advocating for responsible mineral trading, justice and sanctions.

The mineral resources that abound in Eastern Congo are a curse for our people, who languish in misery. In order to obtain these minerals at low cost, foreign powers and certain multinationals have plunged our country into an organized chaos, a means to better plunder the Congo.

As economically advanced countries plan a transition to the so-called "green energy", strategic minerals such as cobalt and lithium will become even more coveted, as they are essential for the global economy and for tackling the climate crisis. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the extraction and trade of these resources become transparent and accountable. We need the products purchased by consumers around the world, including in Norway, not to be tainted by child labor, the sexual exploitation of women or the activity of criminal armed groups.

Secondly, the road to peace will pass through justice. We advocate for the adoption and implementation of a holistic national transitional justice strategy to prevent the recurrence of mass atrocities and promote the rule of law. We therefore call for the establishment of an International Criminal Tribunal for the Congo, a profound reform of the security sector and the vetting of our institutions, truth-seeking mechanisms and reparation programs.

In addition, we urge the community of states, including Norway, to adopt political and economic sanctions against the DRC's aggressor countries, which flout the dictates of the UN Charter.

It is time to move away from the double standards that undermine the credibility of the collective security system and human rights. And if we want a responsible and sustainable energy transition, we urgently need to stop the actors of destabilization in the DRC.

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished professors,

In conclusion, allow me to speak to the human conscience that drives us all, to speak to the universal responsibility that we have in common.

5 years ago, on the winter morning of December 10, 2018, your country honored me with the Nobel Peace Prize, one of the most prestigious awards in the world.

In my acceptance speech, I drew the attention of the honorable assembly of the Nobel Prize Committee and the world to the horror of the war which was decimating millions of children, women and men in the DRC.

What has been done over the past five years? Nothing. It was horror 5 years ago, it's still absolute horror today.

The international community -- including your country -- have turned a blind eye to the rapes, violence and massacres which continue with impunity in Kivu as I speak to you now.

And yet these massacres and their perpetrators are documented in several United Nations reports. And yet, the aggressor countries of the DRC are well known to all.

Let's be frank, ladies and gentlemen. The blindfold with which the international community hypocritically hides its eyes in order not to see, act, or curb these crimes is the inhuman and scandalous exploitation of the strategic minerals which abound in the soil of the Kivus and the DRC. These minerals essentially benefit the economies of your countries as well as globalization in the era of new communication technologies, space ambitions and the green energy transition.

In light of the Congo's contribution to the technological revolution of the 21st century, there is no doubt that it is, at its expense, the lung of this globalization and one of the greatest providers of modern capitalism.

Ladies and gentlemen, although accepting that technological progress is a necessary and irrevocable fact, you and I have the responsibility to ensure that the exploitation of the natural resources which govern this progress is not the basis of the genocide of a whole people.

You and I have the responsibility to give this globalization a more human face.

You and I have the responsibility to ensure that the gains from Congo's mineral resources are shared and also benefit the Congolese people.

You and I have the responsibility to work together to build peace, even impose peace, in this region whose resources are essential to the concerted and sustainable development of our common humanity.

This is why, based on Norway's credibility and historic commitment on the international scene, particularly on issues related to peace diplomacy and conflict resolution, we are today calling on you and your nation to organize with us an international conference to put an end to the Congolese tragedy and think about the future of the African Great Lakes region on a new basis.

This conference will mobilize the international community to find a peaceful way out of the conflicts ravaging the African Great Lakes region, and find paths to sustainable economic and social cooperation in a spirit of regional and global co-development that respects human rights and dignity.

Ladies and gentlemen, this path is possible. This path does exist. Norway has experimented it on several theaters of conflict. Today and tomorrow, Norway also has the responsibility to dare to do so in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Thank you.