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Democratic Republic of Congo, Factor 14

Democratic Republic of Congo: Conflict Prevention Through Diplomatic Initiatives

The rapidly growing nation of the Democratic Republic of Congo is geographically formed by a variety of land features ranging from vast rainforest, to dense grasslands and mountains. Though the resources sound plentiful, the majority of the Congo population is currently hunger stricken. While the war in Congo officially ended in 2003, the country is still rated as the number one humanitarian crisis in the world. Plagued by generations of violent wars and extremist outbursts, the republic and its inhabitants are no longer able to establish the necessary means of life. The displacement of the majority of the 67.8 million residents has led to weak economic conditions and to an even more detrimental, rickety agricultural society. According to research conducted by U.S.-based aid agency, International Rescue Committee (IRC), "fighting frequently prevents people from seeking out what scant health services are available." Dr. Richard Brennan, director of IRC's global health program, recently stated, "When war destroys a country's economy and infrastructure, there's no quick fix, significant improvement in Congo's health and mortality will require years of unwavering commitment from the government and the international community and substantial financial investment. Sadly, the humanitarian crisis in Congo continues to be overlooked and funding remains disproportionate to the enormity of need." In order for the Democratic Republic of Congo to conform a stable, crevice citizenry, government officials must enforce diplomatic initiatives that prevent conflict and reduce the number of vulnerable members in a society.

Violence in Congo has led to the physical and psychological abuse of many children and women. Since they are the main producers and processors of Agriculture, this has led to the 12.4% decline in food production throughout the years of violence. It is clear, in order to sustain an adequate method of producing and marketing their local agricultural products such as their major cash crops: yams, maize and cassava. As a result of the violence and ongoing insecurity in North Kivu, women are at high risk of being sexually abused. This reoccurring abuse, for the majority of Congolese women, lead to debilitating health declines. Since rape is often used as a weapon of war, the women are more susceptible to catching diseases such as HIV/AIDS that could further hinder any rare, agricultural productivity that they may be associated with. In addition to the increasing number of diseases that rape introduces, it also unveils another major issue for the Democratic Republic of Congo, over population. It was recently reported that on average, 48 women are raped every hour in the country that is undeniably, in the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. With this shocking number of women being sexually abused, the chances for unwanted pregnancy skyrocket. Alone, the number of planned child births pose a threat to increasing the number of hungry children. But when the number of unplanned births is added to this number, the threat potentially has the ability to send the crumbling country into an irreversible crisis. If the government took the initiative to stand up for its people, and implemented initiatives that educated Congolese women on the dangers of unwanted pregnancies, I feel that it is possible that this additional crisis could be resolved.

Due to the unsettling rate of hunger and malnourishment in Congo, many farmers are forced by the fear of starvation to utilize agricultural practices that can be found to deplete the soil's naturally found nutrients, and increase desertification. In return, this makes the land unsuited for nourishing crop life that has the ability to feed, heal and resolve the alarming humanitarian conflict in Congo. Along with physical land disruption, many farmers negatively take advantage of water conservation efforts that are implemented by many surrounding countries in hope to support the disintegrating country. This resource abuse restricts the republic from thriving off of any productive methods of agriculture that can be found, due to the vitality of water to all living things.

As a result of Congo's insufficient government assistance in protecting its citizens by enforcing and reinforcing diplomatic policies, many farmers are currently advised to not plant cash crops in fear of their inability to stockpile, and more importantly, protect their crops. Furthermore, this complicates the ability of rural farmers to muster an income ample enough to benefit an entire Congolese family according to the time and battle the individual farmer put into his or her select yield. With agriculture supporting over two thirds of the nations population, it is supposed that each family farms on approximately four acres of land. Without government policies that encourage and protect the local, rural farmer, 3.5% of Congo's land is wasted, therefore transformed into unsustainable resources that lack the ability to resolve the widespread hunger epidemic.

A survey by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative reported that the number of women raped between 2004 and 2008 showed a 17-fold increase in the number of rapes by civilians. In 1999, 8.5% of Congolese women tested positive for AIDS. An estimated 6 million women are currently living with the virus today. When scaled to the number of productive workers in Congo, it's easy to see the horrific effects that AIDS has on the humanitarian crisis. Women affected often experience flu-like symptoms. Obviously, women that are plagued with such debilitating symptoms cannot efficiently carry out the everyday, required labor of managing a sustainable farm. National response to this worldwide epidemic is undoubtedly improving the conditions in Congo, which in return does decrease the rate of women affected by HIV/AIDS. However, a country with a population that is approaching 74 million people cannot simply rely on the charitable work of non-profit organizations. If the conditions of Congolese women are to improve, support from the government must be put into place. In 2011, the number of displaced citizens in Congo was at a staggering 1.7 million. In March of 2012, that number increased to over 2 million people. In order for any country, including Congo, to establish a secure health care initiative, the supporting communities must have the peace of mind to reside in a permanent area. Unfortunately, due to the lack of government protection, millions of Congolese people are forced to flee their homes, and leave behind potentially profitable farms and communities.

In realization of the chaotic order of society in Congo, it is true that the rights of its citizens do not have the securities of per say the American people. However, I believe that it is time for government officials to refrain from involving itself in preventable conflict, and focus more on resolving the spiraling war the country itself is caught up in. Absurdly, recently it was discovered that aid money contributed by the United States and surrounding countries, was being used to support the rebels of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Instead of supplying Congolese people with vital materials for life, the senseless wars were wrongly fueled with the monetary aid money. Consequently, the United States has withdrawn over \$200,000 in federal aid. This withdraw could have been prevented by the government officials of Congo, had they rightfully accepted the responsibilities of being a leader. Furthermore, if the country would invest in educating its society, democratic rights could be readily enforced, allowing the country to develop organizations that targeting the idea of implementing diplomatic policies that protect its people. In order for this, potentially powerful country to prosper in all areas pertaining to agriculture, it must enforce diplomatic initiatives that prevent conflict and reduce the number of vulnerable members in a society.

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