



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

The Rt Hon. David Lammy MP
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King Charles Street
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The Rt Hon. Emily Thornberry MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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17 April 2025

Dear Emily,

Thank you for your letter of 19 March, on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee, regarding the situation in the eastern DRC.

I very much welcome the FAC's ongoing engagement on this subject, including your session on 17 March and continued parliamentary interest in the conflict. I am pleased that Lord Collins, as Minister for Africa, was able to hold a briefing session for parliamentarians on the subject.

The situation in eastern DRC is deeply alarming. The recent offensives by M23 and the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF), including the capture of Goma, Bukavu and Walikale, are an unacceptable violation of DRC's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a breach of the UN Charter. The humanitarian situation is dire. In eastern DRC we have seen widespread displacement, acute food insecurity, and cholera outbreaks; as well as human rights abuses including an increase in sexual and gender-based violence.

I visited Rwanda and DRC in February and made clear to both Presidents, that there can be no military solution to the conflict and that the UK will remain consistent in our support for African-led peace processes. Lord Collins' first visits to Africa as Minister were to Angola, DRC and Rwanda, to meet with Heads of State and encourage engagement in the Angolan-led peace process. I regularly discuss the conflict with my counterparts, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and most recently with the Ugandan and Kenyan Foreign Ministers during the London Sudan Conference. The UK has used every opportunity at the United Nations Security Council and Human Rights Council to urge all parties to de-escalate and engage in good-faith in dialogue. We are in frequent contact with partners across the region to support the EAC and SADC's efforts to facilitate direct engagement with the parties through the Joint Nairobi-Luanda processes. All parties must honour their commitments made at the Joint EAC-SADC Summit on 8 February.

On 25 February, the UK called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access, respect for international humanitarian law, meaningful engagement with African-led peace processes, and the withdrawal of all Rwanda Defence Forces from Congolese territory and announced a set of policy measures designed to support these outcomes. I had been clear with President Kagame that there would be a strong response from the international community should Goma be captured. We worked closely with international partners ahead of the measures and have seen other countries, including partners in the EU and G7, take similar action. The UK's measures, which include a pause in direct bilateral financial aid, will remain in place until significant progress is made. As you note in your letter, I am not able to comment on future sanctions. We will continue to review our policies, and ensure we are taking the necessary steps to encourage Rwanda, and all parties, to de-escalate the conflict and negotiate in good faith.

We are also continuing to support the most vulnerable. As you wrote, the conflict in eastern DRC has led to a surge in sexual and gender-based violence. My statement to the House from January holds, with the DRC remaining one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman or girl. Rising levels of sexual violence in eastern DRC, including reports of brutal rape and murder at Munzenze Prison in Goma, are horrific. The UK is unequivocal – all parties have a duty to protect civilians, including from sexual and gender-based violence, and must comply with international humanitarian law. All parties must ensure the victims and survivors of these heinous crimes receive the life-saving services they need.

The UK is a leading humanitarian partner in DRC. To support the most vulnerable we provided over £80 million in humanitarian assistance during the last financial year, enabling lifesaving assistance and providing access to clean drinking water treatment for malnourished children. It also includes support for victims of sexual violence, such as support to Panzi Hospital, in partnership with UNFPA, to protect staff and patients. We are increasingly concerned how the crisis is impacting the region. UNHCR has registered over 70,000 new arrivals in Burundi and 34,000 in Uganda since January. The UK has responded with an additional £5.3m in flexible funding to the UNHCR appeal aiming at supporting new refugees in the region and IDPs in eastern DRC. We are providing immediate protection to threatened victims and survivors of conflict related sexual violence and local human rights defenders in partnership with TRIAL International. We continue to raise human rights abuses and sexual and gender-based violence internationally, including at the UN Human Rights Council on 1 April.

I am also deeply concerned by reporting from the UN Group of Experts about M23 and Rwanda illegally extracting critical minerals from the DRC, including coltan. Such illegal economic activity must stop. The UK continues to advocate for responsible minerals internationally. We actively promote compliance with the OECD's Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Mineral Supply Chains from Conflict Affected and High-Risk Areas, and we are a founding member of the European Partnership for Responsible Minerals, which promotes "responsibly sourced minerals", with a particular focus on artisanal mining.

Earlier this month we commemorated the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, and we recognise the remarkable progress Rwanda has made across many areas during this time of remembrance. I remain committed to supporting a peaceful Great Lakes region, and delivering mutually beneficial partnerships on growth, climate and security across the wider region.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Lammy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

THE RT HON. DAVID LAMMY MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs



**Foreign Affairs
Committee**



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

19 March 2025

**Rt Hon David Lammy MP
Secretary of State
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

Dear David

The situation in the eastern DRC

On 17 March, the Foreign Affairs Committee held a one-off oral evidence session to examine the developing situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We heard from witnesses including the International Crisis Group's Project Director for the Great Lakes Region, Richard Moncrieff, and Dr Michela Wrong, a journalist and author who has covered Rwanda and the DRC for the last 30 years. The evidence given during this session left the Committee feeling deeply concerned, and Members are resolute that UK measures against Rwanda for its role in perpetrating conflict must go further and be bolder.

Rwanda's role in promoting conflict in the eastern DRC

The Committee heard in the session that Rwanda is complicit in sponsoring the activities of the armed group known as the M23, something which you highlighted in your statement to the House in January. The UN Group of Experts on the DRC has also confirmed Rwanda's involvement in conflict in the eastern DRC, as have our close allies, the G7, the European Union and the United States. The toll of this conflict is immense with hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced. The UK's actions against Rwanda in January and February this year, including diplomatic sanctions, are an impressive starting point. However, further action must be taken. In February, the US imposed sanctions targeting Rwanda's Minister of State for Regional Integration, James Kabarebe, and a senior member of the M23, Lawrence Kanyuka Kingston. On 17 March, the EU imposed sanctions targeting nine individuals linked to the M23 and the Rwandan regime, including five senior M23 leaders and the Commander of the Special Forces of the Rwandan Defence Forces, Ruki Karusisi. These measures include asset freezes and travel bans. Sanctions are most effective when coordinated. Measures which are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Foreign Affairs Committee

synchronised with the EU and US would send a strong message to Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame, that his regime's destabilising actions in the DRC cannot be allowed to continue. In your statement on 25 February, you said that the UK would coordinate with partners on potential new sanctions designations. We appreciate that decisions to impose sanctions cannot be made public in advance. **However, please look again at financial sanctions and travel bans on key leaders in the Rwandan Armed Forces, the regime and senior figures in the M23, for their role in perpetrating violence in the DRC.**

Atrocity crimes and violence against women and girls

The Committee also heard alarming reports of violence against women and girls, and atrocities targeting civilians. Reports by the UN Panel of Experts on the DRC have, in the past, reported that the M23 and Rwandan Defence Forces are punishing civilians perceived to have collaborated with enemy armed groups, with that punishment taking the form of executions, torture, destruction of villages, pillaging or arbitrary detentions. More so, as you said yourself in a statement to the House in January, it was again highlighted that the DRC was "one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman or girl". The Committee heard of a surge in sexual and gender-based violence in the eastern DRC, including reports of summary executions of victims after rape and of female prisoners being raped and then burned alive, as happened in a prison in the city of Goma in February. The UK is a world leader in promoting a rules-based international order, as well as advancing the fight to address atrocity crimes and violence against women and girls. **Can you please set out how the UK plans to address these violations to ensure we do not turn our backs on the most vulnerable.**

UK critical minerals purchased from Rwanda

In recent years, the amount of coltan which Rwanda has exported has increased significantly. The UN Group of Experts on the DRC note that there has been a 50% increase in coltan exports from Rwanda [in 2023] compared to the year before. Expert witnesses told us that, since 2024, "Rwanda and the M23 expanded significantly and took over very significant mining areas [in the DRC]" and that "it [Rwanda] is exporting a very large quantity of valuable minerals that are clearly not being mined in Rwanda." In the UK's pathway towards its green transition, its critical minerals strategy must be transparent and source from true source countries – in this case the coltan is estimated to have come from the DRC, rather than Rwanda. **It is crucial that in any future discussions, negotiations or trade with Rwanda on minerals, the origin of**



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Foreign Affairs
Committee**

those minerals be clearly ascertained, and I'd be grateful if you could set out what the UK Government is doing to ensure that this principle is also followed by other like-minded countries.

This is a fast-moving and precarious situation which the UK has the power to influence. I would greatly appreciate your quick response before the House rises on 8 April. I will be placing this letter and your response in the public domain.

**Dame Emily Thornberry MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee**