

# Church leaders decry atrocities a Congolese fight over minerals: Nearly 200,000 displaced

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A prominent minister told African religious leaders meeting in Uganda that the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo in which civilians are suffering heavy atrocities was triggered by a conflict over natural resources.

“Is it not correct to say that while this war is raging, the mineral resources are being taken out of the country for the benefit of others, rather than for the citizens of the DRC?” said Ishmael Noko, a Zimbabwean clergyperson who is general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation.

(The discovery of tin ore in 2002 and the high prices the ore brings have spawned chaotic looting, killing and ecological ruin, according to the November 16 *New York Times*.)

Noko addressed the November 10-13 meeting of Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa, in Entebbe, near the Ugandan capital of Kampala. IFAPA, with representatives of seven main faith traditions, was founded in Johannesburg in 2002.

Fighting between militias loyal to renegade Congolese general Laurent Nkunda and government forces has intensified in the mineral rich Kivu region near Rwanda. Humanitarian agencies say nearly 200,000 displaced people are sheltering near the town of Goma, while hundreds of others in the bush face the risk of cholera and measles.

If the churches want to be seen as leaders, they must become involved, retired Ugandan Anglican bishop Macleord Baker Ochola II told the group November 10. “We need to be present and take the voice of God to the people who are suffering.”

Separately, a delegation of church leaders from Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo met DRC president Joseph Kabila on November 11,

traveling later to Kigali to meet Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame.

Silence from churches during "such a serious humanitarian disaster" makes it impossible for clergy to preach the love of God, said Burundi's Anglican archbishop, Bernard Ntahoturi, the ecumenical delegation's leader, in a statement to the DRC president.

Ntahoturi cited numerous atrocities being reported—"The suffering of children fleeing into the bush with or without their parents, women atrociously raped, abused and sometimes buried alive, old people and innocent civilians cowardly killed, and the malicious destruction of property and community life."

Human rights groups have accused the rebels as well as the DRC army of using rape as a weapon of war. "Rape in DRC is an international crisis; you need to be there to see how bad it is," Joyce Nima of the Uganda Joint Christian Council told the IFAPA meeting in Entebbe. *-Frederick Nzwili, Ecumenical News International*