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## **Solidarity with the People and Churches of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (revised)**

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1. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have already suffered so much for so long at the hands of so many self-interested actors from within and from outside the country. A deepening political, human rights and humanitarian crisis and escalating conflict are again afflicting the country and its people.
2. Some 4.5 million people – more than in any other country in Africa – have been displaced from their homes, and tens of thousands of refugees are again fleeing to neighbouring countries. DRC's neighbours are already hosting approximately 600,000 people who have fled conflicts in the centre and east of the country.
3. More than 13 million Congolese affected by recent violence are in need of emergency assistance, including food, sanitation, shelter, and education – the same level of need as in Syria. The conflict and instability have been accompanied by exceptionally high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, and have entailed particular suffering for people living with disabilities. Well over half of the number of crisis-affected people are children. An estimated 2 million children are at imminent risk of starvation.
4. Despite its great wealth of natural resources, the DRC remains one of the world's poorest countries due to endemic instability, conflict, corruption, poor governance and unregulated exploitation of its resources. Ten out of 100 children in the DRC die before they reach the age of 5, and more than 40% have stunted growth due to malnutrition.
5. President Joseph Kabila has stayed in power beyond his constitutionally mandated two-term limit, and elections have been twice postponed on questionable grounds. In the context of this constitutional crisis, dissent and opposition is being brutally repressed, and violence is being fomented in different parts of the country for political ends, particularly in the Djugu territory of Ituri province, the Kasai region, North and South Kivu, and Tanganyika provinces.
6. It is sadly apparent that the gravest threat to Congolese civilians comes from the country's own security forces. According to the UN human rights office in the DRC, some 1,180 people were extra judicially executed by Congolese "state agents" in 2017, far more than those killed by any of the armed groups, and a threefold increase over two years.
7. Government security forces have even fired into Catholic church grounds to disrupt peaceful services and processions following Sunday mass, killing at least 18 people and wounding and arresting scores of others. Hundreds of opposition leaders, supporters and pro-democracy and human rights activists have been imprisoned, often without charge or access to family members or lawyers, and meetings and demonstrations banned.
8. The Saint Sylvestre Accord, a power-sharing agreement signed on New Year's Eve 2016 following mediation by the Roman Catholic Church, allowed for President Kabila to remain in power another year beyond the end of his constitutional two-term limit on 19 December 2016, but included a commitment to organize elections by the end of 2017. However, in November 2017 the Electoral Commission (CENI) set

23 December 2018 as the new date for elections, but suggested that numerous “constraints” could result in further postponement.

9. This long-running political crisis is deepening the misery of the people of the DRC, and raising the spectre of increased regional instability with very serious effects for the whole Great Lakes region and beyond.

10. The DRC has been identified as one of the ‘stations’ – or focuses – for the ecumenical movement’s Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The WCC central committee, meeting in Geneva on 15-21 June 2018, reflecting on the mid-point of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace between the WCC’s 10th and 11th Assemblies, and with deepening alarm and concern for the deteriorating situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo:

- ***Calls*** upon the Government of the DRC to stop the killing due to political intolerance, to protect its citizens from violent attack and harassment by state or non-state actors, and to respect fundamental human rights to assembly and to freedom of opinion and expression;
- ***Further calls*** on the Government of the DRC to uphold the constitution and refrain from worsening the crisis and provoking more widespread conflict and violence by further postponement of the elections;
- ***Appeals*** to all members of the international community, and particularly the Southern African Development Community, to strengthen their engagement for durable peace, stability, justice, development, and human rights in the DRC;
- ***Implores*** that countries and companies engaged in exploiting the natural resources of the DRC respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and the human rights of its people;
- ***Urges*** all churches and faith communities of the DRC to work together against politically-motivated violence and incitement to atrocity crimes, for a peaceful and fair election process, and for social and economic justice that provides a foundation for sustainable peace;
- ***Requests*** strengthened international ecumenical solidarity with the churches and people of the DRC in the midst of the current severe crisis, and support for their struggle for peace, for justice and for dignity.