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From The Minister of State

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Lord Hannay
UN Association of the UK
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Ben David,

Thank you for your letter of 31 October following our brief conversation on the situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on 30 October. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I remain deeply concerned at the recent fighting in the eastern DRC, and the impact that this has had on the humanitarian situation. There is an urgent need for long term security in the region, supported by a political resolution of the longstanding differences in the Kivu region and the full commitment of political leaders in the region to implementing the peace agreements already in place.

We have been closely engaged with efforts to achieve this. The Foreign Secretary and I have both recently visited the region to urge the Rwandan and DRC governments to cooperate constructively to re-energise efforts to bring about a political solution. We urged the UN Secretary General to appoint a high-level envoy, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, to mediate between the various parties and implement the existing political agreements. He has already made significant progress with the key regional figures towards finding a resolution acceptable to all sides. We are staying in close contact with him to identify where the UK can play a useful role. We have increased our humanitarian assistance to the region in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of those directly affected by the fighting. And we have also worked closely with the UN to address the security situation and strengthen the response of its peace keeping mission in the areas most vulnerable to violence.

We have looked closely at options for increased military assistance. We believe that the best option is to increase the capability of the UN's political and peace keeping mission in DRC, MONUC, as quickly as possible. We have therefore focused our efforts on two things: making sure MONUC is effectively deployed, and that it has the additional capability it requires, as quickly as possible. We have lobbied the UN to redeploy MONUC's troops, and countries already contributing troops to lift caveats to allow this to happen. 95% of MONUC's 17,000 troops are now stationed in eastern DRC. A better deployed MONUC is already working to ensure the security of the newly vacated zones and to act as a buffer between CNDP and FARDC. Peacekeepers have moved to occupy territory vacated by the CNDP. We also co-sponsored UNSCR 1843, adopted on 20 November, which will allow MONUC to build up an additional 2,785 troops and 300 police.

