

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**House Foreign Affairs Committee - Subcommittee on Africa
Hearing: Advancing President Trump's Washington Accords - Part II**

Testimony of Christian-Geraud Neema B.

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Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and on how President Trump's Washington Accords can be advanced to produce durable peace and stability.

My testimony advances the clear proposition that the Washington Accords represent a meaningful diplomatic achievement, but their success will ultimately depend on whether they are linked to a broader political strategy that addresses the structural drivers of instability in the DRC.

I. The Value and Merits of the Washington Process

At the outset, it is important to state clearly that the merits and value of the Washington process and its agreements should not be underestimated.

First, the process has helped re-establish clarity around Rwanda's role and responsibility¹ in the current M23 crisis in eastern Congo, something Rwanda itself can no longer credibly deny in public. The Rwandan ambassador's recent acknowledgement², in her statement to this committee, of security cooperation between the Rwandan army and the M23 rebellion is a testament to the success of U.S. political pressure in advancing peace in the region.

Second, it has introduced an innovative peace-economic development logic, incentivizing regional actors to view peace as a source of collective benefit and prosperity rather than a constraint – it promotes the idea that development need not be a zero-sum game. By linking stability to development and investment opportunities, the Regional Economic Integration Framework (REIF) encourages countries in the region to become stakeholders in peace rather than passive observers of recurring instability driven by both external interference and internal governance failures.

One caveat warrants attention. The current REIF framework does not include Burundi and Uganda as parties, despite their historical and ongoing involvement in security dynamics in eastern DRC driven by security and economic interests³. This omission represents a potential vulnerability that could affect the framework's long-term coherence and sustainability.

While the REIF addresses the cross-border dimension of the crisis between DRC and Rwanda, it is worth noting that instability in eastern DRC has long since evolved beyond the “conflict minerals” paradigm.

The instability is now increasingly rooted in local dynamics, including land access, disputes over customary authority, community self-defense, and persistent governance failures⁴. In this context, natural resources often serve as a means of financing armed groups rather than the primary cause of violence.

¹ Letter dated 30 December 2025 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council: <https://docs.un.org/en/s/2025/858>

² Statement for the Record H.E. Ambassador Mathilde Mukantabana Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to the United States of America : https://www.rwandainusa.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/USA_user_uploads/Statement_by_Ambassador_Mathilde_to_the_House_of_Foreign_Affairs.pdf

³ Africa File Special Edition: Uganda in the DRC's M23 Conflict—Friend to All, Enemy to None: <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/africa-file-special-edition-uganda-in-the-drcs-m23-conflict-friend-to-all-enemy-to-none#:~:text=Ugandan%20operations%20in%20the%20eastern,Ituri%20province%20in%20late%20January.>

⁴ “Armed conflict, insecurity, and mining in eastern DRC Reflections on the nexus between natural resources and armed conflict” : https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/202010_IPIS_Armed-conflict-insecurity-and-mining-in-eastern-DRC_Accessible-PDF.pdf

As a result, while REIF can contribute to addressing regional trade and economic incentives, durable peace will ultimately depend on confronting the internal political and governance drivers that continue to fuel violence at the local level.

Hence, the REIF, under the right conditions, can provide a strong foundation for further progress.

II. Progress Yet Hurdles Ahead

However, despite this progress, hurdles and spoilers cannot be ignored. Mid-December last year, following the signing of the Washington Accords, the M23 rebellion seized the city of Uvira in South Kivu. After sustained U.S. diplomatic pressure, the M23, which is not part of the Washington process, withdrew from Uvira⁵. The episode underscored a critical reality: The U.S. has enough leverage over stakeholders in this crisis to nudge and influence their actions on the ground. Applied strategically across all parties involved, that pressure can yield significant results for peace and stability in the D.R. Congo.

The Washington process does not operate in isolation; it unfolds alongside and interacts with the Doha process in Qatar.

The Doha process between the Congolese government and the M23 has also produced meaningful, if limited, progress. While slow and difficult – no comprehensive peace agreement has yet been concluded⁶ – the process has achieved something previously considered politically unthinkable in Kinshasa by the DRC government: direct negotiations between the government and the rebellion.

In doing so, Doha acknowledges that the conflict also has internal Congolese dimensions that cannot be resolved solely through interstate diplomacy.

At the same time, the pace and scope of these discussions highlight the limits of the process. Progress has been constrained by the complexity of the issues under negotiation and by the parties' limited incentives to address the deeper political and security questions underpinning the conflict. These constraints raise questions about Doha's ability, on its own, to sustain long-term stabilization beyond short-term de-escalation.

The slow pace of the Doha process and the parties' lack of incentives can be explained by the theory of interconnected arenas in peace negotiations. From an analytical perspective, the Doha process does not operate in isolation. Its pace and substance are increasingly shaped by developments in the Washington track.

For the Congolese government, framing the M23 primarily as an externally driven problem has reinforced the expectation that diplomatic pressure on Rwanda could alter the balance of power on the ground. In this context, incentives to move rapidly toward political concessions in Doha remain limited as long as outcomes in Washington are perceived as potentially decisive.

⁵ On December 18th, 2025, the M23 announced a withdrawal from Uvira citing US-pressure. However it only on January 16th, 2026, that they effectively withdrew from Uvira allowing the return of the congolese army and administration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nid7wb1yVxA>

⁶ On November 15th, 2025, the government of the DRC and M23 movement signed at non-binding framework peace agreement that contains 8 pillars of peace that will need to be discuss to reach a comprehensive peace agreement: [https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-m23-sign-framework-agreement-peace-deal-qatar-2025-11-15/#:~:text=DOHA/KINSHASA%20Nov%2015%20\(Reuters,of%20many%20that%20lie%20ahead.](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-m23-sign-framework-agreement-peace-deal-qatar-2025-11-15/#:~:text=DOHA/KINSHASA%20Nov%2015%20(Reuters,of%20many%20that%20lie%20ahead.)

On the other side, the M23's posture in Doha appears closely linked to its assessment of regional dynamics and its ability to sustain military leverage. As long as it anticipates continued external backing or limited pressure from the Washington process, the incentive to trade battlefield gains for political compromise remains weak.

The result is an unintended but observable effect: progress in Doha becomes conditional on developments in Washington, turning what should be an internal peace-seeking and de-escalation process into a secondary arena shaped by external diplomatic calculations.

Next to these two processes is the African Union mediation effort led by Togolese President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, working with a panel of five former African heads of state. This process is not meant to be a new or competing initiative to Washington or Doha, but rather a phase of continental ownership and coordination in implementing the agreements from those tracks⁷.

Although the African mediation team was designated in 2025, progress has been slow for several reasons, including the complexity of the crisis and the need to align multiple diplomatic frameworks.

In January this year, at a high-level summit in Lomé convened under the mandate of the AU, participants endorsed a unified mediation architecture under African Union leadership, with the goal of harmonizing African, regional, and international efforts – namely the Doha process – and reinforcing coherence among all peace processes

All these efforts deserve recognition, even as they remain focused on managing the immediate crisis, securing a lasting ceasefire, and preventing escalation.

One should not forget that the DRC and the region are not strangers to peace agreements, either bilateral or multilateral, led by international, continental, and external partners. Yet, years later, these crises and others – that are not addressed – have reemerged.

a. Other conflicts, but the same large crisis

It is here the moment to point out a crisis that has gone under-reported. Beyond the M23 crisis, which has attracted significant international attention, the Uganda-originated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) crisis in eastern Congo remains largely overlooked. The ADF has, for years, carried out systematic attacks against civilians, killing men, women, children, and the elderly on a near-weekly basis.⁸

In neighboring Ituri province, additional armed groups – La coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO)⁹ and Convention pour la révolution populaire (CRP) of former ICC-convict Thomas Lubanga¹⁰, connected to Uganda according to UN Group of Experts report – continue to seize territory and inflict civilian casualties, further underscoring the fragmented and multidimensional nature of insecurity in the region.

Reducing the Congolese security crisis exclusively to the M23, largely because of Rwanda's external involvement, risks obscuring these other dimensions of the DRC's instability. Such a narrow focus leaves

⁷ <https://lomepsf.org/2026/01/20/high-level-meeting-on-coherence-and-consolidation-of-the-peace-process-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-the-great-lakes-region/>

⁸ Focusing on M23 allows ADF insurgents to expand in eastern DRC: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/focusing-on-m23-allows-adf-insurgents-to-expand-in-eastern-drc>

⁹ CODECO (Coopérative pour le développement du Congo) is an organized, predominantly made of members of the Lendu ethnic group, armed group in Ituri (eastern DRC) that has evolved from a local self-defence movement into a major driver of intercommunal violence and attacks on civilians since 2017 : UN Group of Experts 2024 report: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/373/37/pdf/n2437337.pdf>

¹⁰ UN experts cast blame on Rwanda and Uganda. What are they doing in DRC?: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/18/un-experts-cast-blame-on-rwanda-and-uganda-what-are-they-doing-in-drc>

millions of Congolese civilians affected by parallel conflicts outside the scope of peace efforts, with little prospect of protection, accountability, or justice.

Thus, the question for all these processes should not be only about ensuring lasting commitment to peace by warring parties in this one specific M23 crisis, but also about addressing the structural issues that make the resurgence of similar crises possible.

III. Rwanda's Role Is Real, But Not Sufficient to Explain the DRC Crisis

Before moving to the next step, it may be important to clarify Rwanda's role in the DRC crisis. Rwanda's involvement in eastern Congo is well documented and significant. And its involvement directly or remotely has been an important component of the DRC's peace and stability crisis.

As for today, it is important to stop and prevent Rwanda's incursion and interference in eastern DRC. No matter how legitimate or not its concern might be, its intervention in eastern DRC is illegal and must be addressed firmly.

However, while doing so, let us keep in mind that foreign interference is not the primary driver of Congo's years-long instability.

Stopping Rwanda alone does not resolve:

- The proliferation of different armed groups and pro-government militias,
- The structural governance failures that allow armed groups to regenerate.
- The bad governance and corruption, which fuel opacity and smuggling in the mining sector

a. Governance Failure as the Structural Enabler

For over two decades, weak institutions, corruption, and fragmented security forces have prevented the Congolese state from exercising effective authority. These conditions facilitate armed group financing, mineral smuggling, and repeated cycles of violence.

Until these structural weaknesses are addressed, peace agreements will remain fragile and reversible.

IV. Fragmentation and the Overlap Between Peace Processes

Building on the need for lasting peace and stability in the DRC, current efforts and processes may be improved by addressing their fragmentation, overlap, and interconnections, which blur stakeholders' responsibilities and weaken accountability.

Each of these processes creates a dynamic that influences posture and incentivizes or disincentivizes stakeholders' engagement in some processes at the expense of others and of the overarching goal of lasting peace and stability.

Thus, the need to streamline all of them into a comprehensive and complementary peace and stability strategy for the DRC.

For now, each process addresses a component of the crisis. However, neither addresses the internal political and institutional crisis of the Congolese state that enables both armed group proliferation and foreign intervention.

- **Washington** addresses the interstate dimension between Rwanda and the DRC.
- **Doha** addresses the internal dimension of the conflict between the Congolese government and the M23, yet dependent on Washington
- **The African Union (AU)** seems so far broad about the scope of its intervention and its goals, which may explain its slow progress beyond consultation meetings.

This fragmentation produces three risks:

1. Unclear responsibility and accountability;
2. An absence of measurable milestones.
3. The unintended marginalization of the African Union, the institution that may be best positioned and most incentivized to address the systemic nature of the Congolese crisis, given that the crisis's direct consequences are impacting the continent first.

President Trump's efforts for peace and stability in the DRC will remain incomplete if they stop at the international level and are not connected to a broader effort to rebuild Congolese political and institutional foundations, thereby preventing new crises from emerging.

Hence, in a context of a streamlined comprehensive peace-stability building strategy, both Washington and Doha zoom in on the immediate crisis, where **the AU** *should* address the systemic political crisis of the Congolese state and the coherence of peace processes

And this is where the next step for the Washington process should be. Let me be clear: the goal and intent are not for the U.S. government to engage in or commit to broader peace-state building in the DRC, but rather to be an actor that decisively supports a continental-led process to address these issues through an inclusive and comprehensive Congolese political dialogue.

V. Why this Should Matter to the U.S.

Governance reform in the DRC is not an abstract goal; good governance and long-term peace and stability directly serve U.S. interests. They are essential conditions for the effectiveness of the REIF – even if cross-border issues are addressed, unaddressed internal issues will spoil the process – and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), anchoring these initiatives beyond short-term political considerations or transient political arrangements in Kinshasa.

As the United States deepens its engagement with the Congolese government, it also has a strategic interest in managing the expectations that accompany that partnership. Close political alignment, if not carefully calibrated, can create perceptions of unconditional support that weaken incentives for restraint, accountability, and institutional reform.

In the DRC, where political power has historically been centralized, and institutions remain fragile, there is a real risk that strong external backing may be interpreted domestically as tolerance for governance practices that undermine long-term stability. Preventing such misperceptions reinforces the principle that partnership is anchored in institutions, rules, and accountability rather than in individuals.

VI. Advancing the Washington process

It is understandable that Washington initially focused on the bilateral dimensions of the crisis and may not want to engage in what could be a long, complex state-peace-building process in the DRC.

However, the Washington process has generated sufficient political influence and leverage for this administration to encourage and actively support initiatives and continent-led efforts aimed at that goal – the state-peace-building process in the DRC.

Doing so creates an opportunity to support an African Union-led political process, openly backed by the United States, that can address the Congolese crisis from within the region. This approach limits U.S. exposure while increasing the likelihood of durable outcomes for all involved.

VII. The Important Role of Congolese Civil Society

Any durable peace process in the DRC must go beyond political and military actors and ensure the meaningful inclusion of Congolese civil society in both its design and implementation.

I recognize that Congolese civil society is complex and diverse. Incorporating such a heterogeneous set of actors into formal peace processes is a daunting task. Yet long-term peace and stability cannot be achieved without societal buy-in, regardless of how fragmented civil society may be.

Within this complexity, however, there exist structured, nationally rooted institutions that have historically articulated the voice of Congolese society across political, ethnic, and regional divides. The Catholic Church and the Protestant Church have long played this role.

They did not wait for the Washington or Doha processes before calling for an internal Congolese political dialogue to address the deeper causes of the crisis¹¹. However, their initiative lost momentum due to the government's lack of adherence, which prioritized external initiatives.

These institutions possess the organizational capacity, territorial reach, and moral authority necessary to reflect the diversity and tensions of Congolese society. Excluding them from peace processes risks weakening the social legitimacy of any agreement and undermining its prospects for implementation.

Peace processes that are negotiated primarily among political and military elites may produce short-term arrangements, but they often fail when they are not embraced by society at large. This risk is particularly acute in contexts where political leaders may lack incentives to fully resolve crises that can serve short-term political objectives.

VIII. Let's remember Justice

Peace and economic development are rightly central to the agreements. However, the near-absence of a justice component creates a structural vulnerability in their implementation. In contexts such as the DRC where institutions remain weak, governance deficits persist, and cycles of violence have lasted for decades, peace processes that do not address accountability and grievances risk losing legitimacy among affected populations.

¹¹ In January 2025, Catholic and Protestant churches launched the Social Pact for Peace in the DRC initiative, aimed at promoting dialogue for peace and stability: <https://www.vaticannews.va/fr/eglise/news/2025-01/rdc-grands-lacs-cenco-et-ecc-pacte-paix-et-bien-vivre-ensemble.html>

This omission carries consequences. For communities that have endured repeated violence, displacement, and loss, the perception that peace is pursued without justice can reinforce resentment and fuel incentives for retribution, particularly in environments where state institutions lack credibility. Over time, this dynamic can undermine stabilization efforts and contribute to the recurrence and mutation of conflict.

Integrating considerations of accountability and victim recognition into the broader political process would strengthen the social legitimacy of the Washington Accords and reduce the risk that they are perceived as elite agreements disconnected from the lived experience of millions of Congolese affected by violence.

IX. Recommendations

1. Sustain calibrated pressure on Rwanda

Maintain diplomatic and necessary pressure to ensure the withdrawal of Rwandan support to the M23 and to deter future interference in eastern DRC.

2. Support an AU-facilitated, Congolese-led political dialogue

Publicly and decisively support an inclusive political dialogue under African Union leadership to address governance failures, institutional weakness, and national reconciliation

3. Use U.S. leverage to accelerate progress in Doha

Encourage both the Congolese government and the M23 to move toward a comprehensive political settlement, while recognizing the limits of military leverage as a substitute for political compromise.

4. Safeguard the integrity of the Strategic Partnership Agreement

The United States should ensure that its strategic partnership and diplomatic support are clearly anchored in institutions, legal frameworks, and accountability mechanisms rather than in personal or political alignment with any single administration.

5. Ensure meaningful inclusion of Congolese civil society

Encourage the participation of structured civil society actors, particularly the Catholic and Protestant Churches and local communities, to strengthen social legitimacy and implementation capacity

Conclusion

Over the years, weak institutions and state fragility have proven to be the main drivers of political instability and poor governance, which fuel all forms of security crises and thus hinder peace and development. The resurgence of the M23 has once again exposed one layer of a deeper, multi-dimensional crisis.

The Washington Accords mark a meaningful step forward by strengthening accountability and linking peace to development. However, addressing the M23 crisis alone will not resolve the deeper instability undermining peace and stability in the DRC.

For the Washington process to be complete and have a broader impact for long-term peace and stability in the DRC, for both the region and the U.S.' long term interest, it ought to be anchored in a larger continental process, openly and clearly supported by the U.S. for an inclusive congolese dialogue that will aim to address the enablers of recurrent instability in the country.

Without it, the U.S-DRC Strategic partnership remains vulnerable to the same political uncertainties that have historically deterred sustained U.S. investment and engagement. The REIF may have laid the

groundwork for regional peace, but domestic spoilers threaten both peace and prosperity in the DRC and the wider Great Lakes region.