



global witness

For immediate release: Tuesday 29th June

**30th JUNE MARKS 50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE FOR THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO – BUT SERIOUS CHALLENGES
LIE AHEAD.**

“Freedom from violence and poverty is the way forward” says Congo Now!

With the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) set to celebrate 50 years of independence on June 30th, the Congo Now! campaign is launching a series of events to celebrate the rich creativity of the Congolese people and raise awareness of the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in the east of Congo.

Congo Now! is backed by over 30 NGOs working on Congo, including Christian Aid, Oxfam and Global Witness, as well as UK-based Congolese groups, and the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Great Lakes Region of Africa. The campaign is calling on the new UK Government to revitalise its commitment to end the violence and the suffering of civilians in DRC.

The campaign marries a range of cultural events with campaign activities to raise awareness of the crisis in Congo: from a cocktail party featuring award-winning photojournalist Susan Schulman, to Parliamentary roundtables; from a run in support of Congo’s women in Regent’s Park, to talks by activist Sam Roddick.

A key highlight is a night of entertainment at the Southbank Centre with Sandi Toksvig, Eddie Kadi and Ronan Bennett to name a few, and the launch of a postcard petition aimed at Prime Minister David Cameron calling for the UK Government to do more to protect Congolese civilians from violence and suffering .

Thandie Newton, a key supporter of Congo Now, said:

“2010 is the anniversary of 50 years of independence for the Democratic Republic of Congo – but isn’t it time now that Congolese people were truly free? Free from the violence of the conflict and free from unnecessary poverty when surrounded by such enormous natural wealth. I really hope that people take note of what is happening in Congo and that the British Government redoubles its efforts to create a safe and dignified future for the Congolese people.”

Eric Joyce MP, Congo Now! spokesperson said:

“The 30th June sees Congo marking 50 years of independence, but for many in the eastern parts of Congo, there is little to celebrate. Some two million people are unable to go home as a result of the conflict, with rape and violence daily threats. It is tragic that this conflict has been forgotten for so long. We are calling on our politicians to mark this anniversary by doing more to help build a Congo free of violence.”

The DRC has been described as the ‘heart of Africa’ and is home to enormous natural wealth and resources. However for the last 15 years, the country has been mired in conflict – described as the world’s deadliest since World War II:

- with an estimated 5.4 million dead from the effects of the conflict – more than 2.7 million of them children

- over 9,000 people were raped in Kivu provinces of eastern Congo last year.
- over 115,000 people were displaced in the first three months of 2010^[1]

The UK government is currently the largest bilateral donor to the DRC, with a commitment of £130 million for 2010. However, Congo Now! is calling on the **UK to maintain its funding and strengthen its political efforts on the DRC. In particular it is calling on the UK to:**

- **Stop natural resources fuelling the conflict** – by adopting legislation to ensure that materials purchased by UK companies neither finance armed groups nor contribute to human rights abuses.
- **Protect civilians from violence** – by calling on the Congolese government to reform their armed forces, which too often prey on rather than protect civilians; and urging the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Congo to protect people and ensure guarantees for civilian safety are put in place before any significant reduction of peacekeepers takes place.
- **Promote non-military and regional solutions to the conflict** – to ensure that the underlying causes of the conflict are addressed and unnecessary suffering of the civilian population is avoided.
- **Address the devastating causes and consequences of conflict and sexual violence particularly for women and children** – by providing effective humanitarian and development assistance across the country, including for projects focused on the care for survivors of sexual violence and former child soldiers.

For more information please email press@congonow.org, or visit www.congonow.org.

Congo Now Coordinator Tamsin Larby is available for comment, as are a number of spokespeople from Congo Now!” Coalition organisations listed below.

NOTES TO EDITOR:

ABOUT CONGO NOW:

The ‘Congo Now!’ campaign is committed to raising public awareness of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – a country that has experienced a brutal conflict for the last 15 years and where civilians continue to suffer daily abuses. The campaign presses for effective political action by the UK to end this suffering and bring urgently-needed improvements in security and governance to the people of the DRC.

The campaign brings together nearly 30 UK NGOs working in Congo and Congolese diaspora groups. Through cultural events and campaign activities, Congo Now! works to engage the public, policy-makers and media to find solutions to the drivers and devastating consequences of the conflict in the DRC and to recognise the extraordinary resilience and creativity of its people and culture.

Congo Now! aims to:

- Create a greater public awareness of the DRC's ongoing humanitarian crisis
 - Coordinate actions to bring attention to the underlying causes of the war for resources that ravages the eastern region of DRC
 - Raise demands on the UK government and international community to address the causes of the conflict and respond to the consequences
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The Congo Now! Coalition includes: ACORD, Afrik Youth Network, Amnesty International, APPG on the Great Lakes Region of Africa, CAFOD, CARE International UK, Christian Aid, Congo Church Association, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Georges Malaika Foundation, Global Witness, International Rescue Committee, Invisible Children, Merlin, New Direction for Congo, OSI, Oxfam GB, Prayer for Peace for Congo, Save the Children UK, Save the Congo, SoPPro, Tatiana Giraud Foundation, Tearfund, V-Day UK, War Child, Women for Women International, World Vision UK. **Please note that these organisations have individual policies in specialist areas. They are not able to comment on the full text of the key messages – but only their policy areas.**

SPOKESPEOPLE:

Eric Joyce MP – Chair of the APPG Great Lakes Region of Africa. 07527 450028 or Sophia Pickles 020 7219 1165

Tamsin Larby – Coordinator of Congo Now! tamsin@congonow.org 07974 928333
Can refer journalists to individuals in coalition organisations or performers/speakers from events

Global Witness – Emilie Serralta - eserralta@globalwitness.org 0207 492 5855

Susan Schulman – Award winning photojournalist – for photograph release: susanschulman@mac.com or 07773 800 775

Christine Karumba – Women for Women International's Programme Director for the Congo – **will be in London from 05 July – 09 July and is available for interview.** For media inquiries about Women for Women's programme in the Congo, or if you are interested in interviewing Christine Karumba, please contact Helen Ashley on 020 8974 7241, mobile 07976 804314 hashley@womenforwomen.org

EVENTS SNAPSHOT:

(Please see www.congonow.org for further information)

Saturday 3 July, 8.30am registration, 9am start, Regents Park, London

£10 to register to run, free to cheer!

First Official UK Run For Congo Women, Organised by Women for Women International

Run for Congo is a grassroots movement that raises money for the women of Congo. The first official Run for Congo UK will be taking place at the Regents Park Race on July 3rd 2010. For more information please contact runforcongouk@womenforwomen.org

Saturday 3 July, TROXY, 490 Commercial Road, London, E1 0HX

Tickets – www.congo50.com

La Retrospective/Le Demi Siècle, Organised by Congo50.

Congo50's Golden Anniversary Musical. An amazing evening full of Culture, traditions, Music, Dance, Film and Fashion. ***A NIGHT NOT TO BE MISSED. MASOLO YA BANA MBOKA YA SOLO***

Tuesday 6 July, 7.00pm, Amnesty International Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A

£3 unwaged, £5 waged.

Congo – Stronger Women, Stronger Nations, Organised by Women for Women International and Oxfam

Hear from Women for Women International's DRC Country Director Christine Karumba, human rights activist Sam Roddick, Judith Wanga from BBC documentary The Worlds Most Dangerous Place For Women and Susan Schulman photo journalist and Amnesty Media Award winner as a part of an expert panel discussing the impact of the current conflict in DRC on women and the vital role that they are playing in building a stable Congo. For further information email Kate Hughes on KHughes@womenforwomen.org

Friday 9 July, 5.30pm, The Front Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre, London. Free.

Friday Night Tonic with Grupo Lokito as part of the *London Literature Festival*
Organised by the APPG on the Great Lakes Region of Africa and Susan Schulman
Congoese rumba fuses with Cuban Salsa. This concert is part of the Congo Now! event at Southbank Centre.

Friday 9 July, 7.45pm, Purcell Room, Southbank Centre, London

£9.00. ***Congo Now! as part of the London Literature Festival***

Organised by the APPG on the Great Lakes Region of Africa and Susan Schulman
Congo Now! is an evening to celebrate the incredible vitality and resilient creativity of the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Congoese poets, writers, performers and musicians will be joined in solidarity by artists from around the world to mark the 50th anniversary of Congoese Independence. For more information please email tamsin@congonow.org

Friday 9 July, 10.00pm – 1.00am, Concrete, Hayward Gallery Bar, Southbank Centre, London. Free.

Congo Now! as part of the London Literature Festival

Organised by the APPG on the Great Lakes Region of Africa and Susan Schulman
Music from Afrocult DJ's inside Concrete and photographs projected outside Concrete until the early hours.