

11 April 2011

EU High Representative Catherine Ashton
Rue de la Loi 175
1040 Brussels
Belgium

Dear High Representative,

We write to express our concern that there has not yet been a new nomination for the position of EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Great Lakes Region. As NGOs active in the area we are deeply worried about the political and security situation in the region and strongly believe that the EUSR for the Great Lakes Region, with its specific emphasis on a regional approach, continues to bring an added value to the international community's efforts to bring peace and stability to the region as a whole.

The situation in the Great Lakes region is far from stable. Rwanda continues to be marked by restricted freedom of expression; political tensions and armed elements in post-election Burundi have resulted in a recent wave of killings and a crackdown on civil society and media; and the continuing insecurity and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), especially in the East, continues to threaten the safety of civilians. Upcoming events, including elections in the DRC, entail a risk of further destabilisation and conflict.

Moreover ongoing military confrontations between DRC armed forces (FARDC) and the Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR), as well as violence perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (which has spiked in recent months) continue to pose a threat to regional stability. That solving these long-standing issues requires the cooperation of all governments in the Great Lakes region only highlights the need for the EU to retain a regional perspective in its foreign policy towards these countries.

We believe the EUSR for the Great Lakes Region is crucial to addressing transnational challenges and to ensuring a well-coordinated approach to regional cooperation on conflicts and instability. This particular position has helped mobilise the international community around regional issues such as the LRA and cross-border armed groups as well as the illegal exploitation of natural resources. It has also provided invaluable support to international processes with a direct bearing on the region such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Great Lakes Contact Group.

We strongly urge you to consider our concern about the situation in the region and appoint a new EUSR for the Great Lakes Region as soon as possible.

Respectfully,

Representatives of the following 13 organisations:



Begona Inarra
Executive Secretary
**Africa Europe Faith and Justice
Network**



Alain Délétroz
Vice-President
International Crisis Group (Europe)



Heather Grabbe
Director
Open Society Institute Brussels



Nicolas Berger
Director
**Amnesty International European
Institutions Office**



Guido Dost
Director
**Johanniter International
Assistance**



Jeremy Hobbs
Director
Oxfam International



Pol De Greve
Director
Broederlijk Delen



Victor Scheffers
Director
Justitia et Pax Netherlands



Jo Hanssens
President
Pax Christi



Henri van Eeghen
Director
Cordaid



Ilona Auer-Frege
Coordinator
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Marius Wanders
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**World Vision International
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Kris Berwouts
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