



# Peace and Social Justice for the DR Congo, now!

*People's Health Movement West & Central Africa (PHM WCA) Position Paper on the situation in DR Congo.*

## **Key Messages:**

- ⇒ By reducing the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo to epidemics of virus diseases, the international community and the mainstream media supported by the 'Coronavirus wave', are not helping to put up for discussion the historical humanitarian challenge of the country and the diversity of the evils that undermine it such as, for example, the food insecurity that is affecting around 20 million people in 2021.
- ⇒ Rather than a plan for permanent humanitarian aid, it is a global thrust for social justice in the country that PHM WCA calls for. This implies a mobilization, not only of the United Nations but also and above all, of the African Union and the European Union.
- ⇒ Tackling the deep-rooted causes of the humanitarian crisis and working towards a holistic approach to resolving the crisis seems essential to achieve this.

## **Ebola or the tree hiding behind the Congolese forest**

By reducing the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to repeated epidemics of the Ebola virus disease (EVD), the international community and the mainstream media helped by the Coronavirus wave, are contributing to hide the historic humanitarian challenge of the country which goes well beyond a simple annual humanitarian response plan. The official declaration that followed the end of the 11th epidemic of the Ebola virus disease on 18 November 2020

was,<sup>1</sup> once again, an opportunity for the mainstream media and international organizations, led by WHO, to celebrate the end of the epidemic. This, even though the World Health Organization says it still needs tens of millions of dollars to maintain its team's surveillance and reaction capacities in order to end the epidemic for good. It seemed time to celebrate everywhere --until several cases of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.la-croix.com/RDC-annonce-fin-11eme-epidemie-Ebola-2020-11-18-1301125229>

Ebola were detected in early 2021,<sup>2</sup> followed by the declaration of a new epidemic. Mass vaccination plans for the disease are announced. However, on analysis, what will alleviate the efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not only attacking the virus diseases, but also and above all, the permanent deleterious socioeconomic and political situation that has characterized it for decades.

This is why the People's Health Movement in West and Central Africa (PHM WCA) is calling for international solidarity and general mobilization to save the country before the situation escalates further. Indeed, while the whole world measures the well-being of the DR Congo in terms of virus diseases, the country has much to do about its other humanitarian disasters.<sup>3</sup> These include, among other:

- **measles:** in August 2020, the Congolese authorities announced the end of the epidemic considered to be the most serious in the world with nearly 300,000 cases and around 7,000 deaths,<sup>4</sup> but an upsurge is still possible given the civil conflicts that can obstruct vaccination.

- **HIV / AIDS:** in 2019 more than 520,000 people lived with the virus. 53% of which were on ARV treatment and there were 21,000 new infections.<sup>5</sup>

- **Armed conflicts:** DR Congo has 5.2 million internally displaced people in addition to the 527,000 refugees from neighboring

countries.<sup>6</sup> Access to mineral resources is an essential element in the conflicting geopolitics of the Great Lakes Region; it largely explains the continuing insecurity in the country fuelled by armed groups.<sup>7</sup>

- **cholera:** DR Congo is the most affected country in the West and Central Africa region with 95.7% and 87.9% of the cases reported respectively in the first quarters of 2019 and of 2020.<sup>8</sup>

- **famine:** more than 3.4 million children under five suffer from acute malnutrition. The integrated phase classification (IPC) analysis indicates that severe and acute food insecurity has reached the highest level on record and will affect around 19.6 million people between January and June 2021.<sup>9 10</sup>

- **malaria:** in 2018, the Democratic Republic of Congo had 12% of morbidity cases and 11% of deaths associated with malaria in the world.<sup>11</sup> In 2019, there were 21 million cases and 13,000 deaths.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20210207-la-rd-congo-annonce-le-retour-du-virus-ebola-dans-l-est-du-pays>

<sup>3</sup> OCHA (2020). *Aperçu des besoins humanitaires République Démocratique du Congo*, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/file\\_s/hno\\_2021\\_drc\\_finalv3.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/file_s/hno_2021_drc_finalv3.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.rtb.be/info/monde/detail\\_rdc-fin-de-l-epidemie-de-rougeole-qui-a-tue-7-000-enfants-en-deux-ans?id=10568924](https://www.rtb.be/info/monde/detail_rdc-fin-de-l-epidemie-de-rougeole-qui-a-tue-7-000-enfants-en-deux-ans?id=10568924) ;

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-53921494>

<https://www.unaids.org/fr/regionscountries/countries/democraticrepublicofthecongo>

<sup>6</sup> <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/02/1088872>

<sup>7</sup> BOSSE (2020). *Minerais de sang et néocolonialisme en République Démocratique du Congo (RDC)*

*Le conflit au Kivu, zone grise en proie à de cruciales rivalités géoéconomique,*

<https://www.diploweb.com/Afrique-Minerais-de-sang-et-neocolonialisme-en-Republique-Democratique-du-Congo-RDC.html>

<sup>8</sup> Cholera Outbreaks in Central and West Africa : 2020 Regional Update - Week 1-13, [http://mail.platefor.mywhc.ca/attachments/article/932/WCAR%20Cholera\\_Update\\_W1-13\\_2020%27.pdf](http://mail.platefor.mywhc.ca/attachments/article/932/WCAR%20Cholera_Update_W1-13_2020%27.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/02/1088872>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.unocha.org/democratic-republic-congo-drc/about-ocha-drc>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.severemalaria.org/fr/pays/republique-e-democratique-du-congo#:~:text=En%202018%2C%20la%20République%20Démocratique,des%20cas%20en%20Afrique%20centrale.>

<sup>12</sup> <https://afrique.lalibre.be/49628/rdc-le-paludisme-premiere-cause-de-mortalite-avec-plus-de-13-000-deces-en-2019/>

• **Lack of safe drinking water:** the country has 50% of the African continent's water reserves, but 33 million people in rural areas do not have access to quality water.<sup>13</sup>

To all of this must be added water pollution, almost endemic inflation and 70% of the population living below the poverty line.<sup>14</sup>

### **Laudable efforts engulfed in an ocean of insecurity**

PHM WCA salutes the leadership of the Congolese government, as well as the ongoing institutional commitment in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the health sector. Among others, we can cite the development of a National Strategic Plan on Universal Health Coverage in which PHM RD Congo has actively participated. The Strategy was officially launched in February 2020 in the presence of the DG of WHO and other operational partners.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Health has set up a unit on e-health to promote the digitization of the sector (welcome in this context of pandemics).<sup>16</sup> But it is conflicts that are largely behind the key problems in the country.

While recognizing the importance of measures to strengthen the health system, we believe that

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/drcongo/ce-que-nous-faisons/eau-hygiène-et-assainissement#:~:text=La%20République%20Démocratique%20du%20Congo,de%20l%27eau%20de%20qualité> ;

[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hrp\\_2021-vf\\_28\\_janvier\\_web\\_ok-links.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hrp_2021-vf_28_janvier_web_ok-links.pdf)

<https://www.banquemonde.org/fr/country/drc/overview#:~:text=Mais%20elle%20demeure%20l%27un,Nord-Ouest%20et%20des%20Kasaï.&text=Le%20pays%20se%20remet%20encore,éclaté%20dans%20les%20années%201990>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200215-rdc-lancement-plan-couverture-sante-universelle-questions-financement>;

[https://www.who.int/fr/director-general/speeches/detail/kinshasa-international-conference-on-universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/fr/director-general/speeches/detail/kinshasa-international-conference-on-universal-health-coverage-(uhc))

<sup>16</sup> <https://deskeco.com/rdc-une-cellule-e-sante-installe-au-cabinet-du-ministre-de-la-sante>

investment in the search for lasting peace and stability is perhaps more essential. Indeed, the instability of the country remains a brake on the containment of viral diseases and other epidemics, on the development of populations, and on the implementation of health policies and other initiatives (even the most ambitious for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals).

Additional assorted problems such as the brain drain, organized cross-border raids and crimes, as well as the plunder of natural resources are further indicators of the country's instability. Such events are not likely to guarantee the intensification of "community health and nutrition surveillance in order to improve the situation" or "to ensure a constant availability of qualified health workers" as recommended by the Regional strategy for integrated disease surveillance and response 2020-2030 adopted by the WHO Regional Committee for Africa at its 69th session in Brazzaville in 2019.<sup>17</sup>

### **Humanitarian aid yes, but above all peace and social justice**

David McLachlan-Karr, Humanitarian Coordinator in DR Congo indicated that donor contributions to finance the humanitarian response plan are essential to strengthen the protection of millions of people affected by the crisis. The DR Congo Humanitarian Response Plan for 2021 costs about US \$ 2 billion. In 2020, barely 36% of the budget necessary for the humanitarian response plan was mobilized.<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> We are not unaware of the immense effort of WHO, supported by other United Nations agencies and international NGOs to control of the health crisis. We also congratulate the coordination of the response against the Ebola which has kept the same

<sup>17</sup>

<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331483?locale-attribute=fr&>

<sup>18</sup> <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/02/1088872>

<sup>19</sup> OCHA (2021). Plan de réponse humanitaire République Démocratique du Congo, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hrp\\_2021-vf\\_28\\_janvier\\_web\\_ok-links.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hrp_2021-vf_28_janvier_web_ok-links.pdf)

rigor against the Coronavirus. But we believe it is imperative to address the root causes of the country's instability and humanitarian crisis. We also believe that updating annual humanitarian aid plans every year will not be sufficient for the DR Congo's stability. The situation further weakens the country's health system and has a negative impact on health.

It is therefore a global burst for social justice in the country that PHM West & Central Africa is calling for. As PHM stated in its Cape Town Call for Action in 2012 (PHA3) and reaffirmed in its PHA4 statement, there is no possible change without mobilizing the people through building social and political power in the population and in communities.<sup>20</sup>

The DR Congo is assuming the presidency of the African Union in 2021. This puts it at the heart of African diplomacy and dynamics in the various regions of the continent including that of the Great Lakes. Only a holistic approach to resolving the humanitarian and politico-economic crisis will overcome the crises highlighted above. This is the reason why, PHM WCA is calling on progressive public interest civil society organizations and social movements around the world to join this march to "save the soldier DR Congo".

We invite progressive civil society organizations from West and Central Africa to join us in national advocacy processes with WHO and other United Nations agencies for a more central consideration of the right to health and its social, economic and cultural determination. We also draw the attention of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa to the importance of these determinants of health.<sup>21</sup> We believe that the issue of health in the countries of the region must be resolved by taking into account the specific national and sub-regional political realities in order to anticipate the situations likely to hinder the implementation of an equitable health system, as well as the well-being of populations.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://phmovement.org/pha4-declaration-and-public-consultation-2-2/>

<sup>21</sup>

<https://www.who.int/sdhconference/declaration/en/>

In the coming months, PHM WCA will produce policy notes, position papers, declarations and articles on the slow downtrend of this country whose immense wealth should be sufficient to address the whole of West and Central Africa's livelihood needs.

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