Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 28, 2014

Léon Kengo Wa Dondo
President, Senate
Palais du Peuple, Kinshasa

Aubin Minaku
Speaker, National Assembly

c/o Dr. Faida Matifu
Ambassador to the United States
Democratic Republic of Congo
1726 M Street NW, Suite 601
Washington, DC 20036

Dear President Kengo and Speaker Minaku:

We the undersigned members of the United States (U.S.) Congress send greetings to you and the members of the National Assembly and the Senate. We value the good relationship between our two countries, and hope that the United States of America and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will continue to work together on issues of mutual concern. As fellow legislators, we also understand and respect your commitment to serving the needs of the constituents you have been elected to represent.

We understand that your government has been engaged in a year-long process to strengthen your country's intercountry adoption process. We share your concern that this process be as protective of the children as possible. At the same time we recognize how vital it is for children living without the love and protection of a family to be placed with an appropriate family as quickly as possible. As Parliament considers the agenda for this legislative session, we ask that legislation to strengthen the adoption process be a top priority.

We are concerned about the welfare of the hundreds of Congolese children who have been legally adopted under Congolese law by U.S. citizens but who are unable to depart the DRC even though they possess valid visas to immediately enter the U.S. Some of these children have remained separated from their legal parents for over a year waiting for this final departure permission from the DRC. Tragically, some of these children have died while waiting for exit permission, and others are very ill and need immediate medical attention. We hope that you will agree that swift action is necessary to prevent further loss of innocent lives and the continued suffering and distress for the children and their legal parents.

We are aware of your concerns about the integrity of the DRC intercountry adoption process, and we respect your duty to discern how to protect the best interests of Congolese children. For this reason, we reiterate our April 17, 2014 offer to President Kabila and Prime Minister Ponyo to

support your government's efforts to follow up on the well-being of Congolese children adopted by U.S. citizens and to work together to ensure that intercountry adoptions between our countries continue to be conducted in an ethical, transparent manner.

As lawmakers, we wish to assure you that U.S. law protects all children in our country, regardless of their country of birth or citizenship. For example, for 40 years the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) has provided our states with support to improve their child protective services, ensuring that communities are able to prevent, assess and treat cases of child abuse and neglect. CAPTA sets high standards that have helped greatly in ensuring that all incidents of abuse or neglect are reported in a consistent manner and has enabled us to provide better protection and assistance to children experiencing abuse or neglect.

The U.S. Congress has also enacted many laws that prohibit trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation of any children in the U.S., regardless of their country of birth. The laws also impose stiff penalties, up to life imprisonment or death, for those convicted of committing such horrible crimes. With respect to intercountry adoptions, Congress has passed two laws in the past 15 years which have strengthened our internal systems for overseeing and managing international adoption service providers. These two laws, the Intercountry Adoption Act (P.L. 106-279) and the Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act (P.L. 112-276), together require that all U.S. adoption service providers be accredited through a rigorous review process which holds them to high ethical and performance standards. These changes have resulted in a sharp decline in the number of adoption service providers because only those who meet these high standards are allowed to operate in the U.S.

In conclusion, we remain committed to ensuring that federal laws in the U.S. continue to protect all children against abuse and neglect, and to appropriately punish any persons who violate these laws. We respectfully request that the Congolese National Assembly and Senate prioritize legislation that strengthens the Congolese intercountry adoption process. This legislation would ensure that intercountry adoptions of Congolese children can be completed in an honest, ethical manner, and that the children who are currently waiting to be united with their legal parents can finally benefit from living with the security of a permanent, loving family.

Sincerely,

John Cornyn, United States Senator

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