

Testimony in Support of the Petition
for
2020 Eligibility of The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
As a Beneficiary Sub-Saharan African Country
For the Purpose of Section 506A of the Trade Act of 1974

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Mr. Chairman, and members I come before this honorable committee, today, representing members of the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network in the United States and across sub-Saharan Africa, including, the 39 currently AGOA eligible countries, to testify in support of the petitions of the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to become a beneficiary sub-Saharan African country after having been suspended by the President of the United States pursuant to section 506 A (a) (3) of the Trade Act of 1974 on January 1, 2011.

My name is Fred Olagoke Oladeinde, and I am Chairman of the AGOA Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network Secretariat www.agoacsonetwork.org The AGOA CSO Network is a consortium of non- governmental organizations (NGO's), micro, small to medium-sized businesses, chambers of commerce and various other groups and individuals in the United States and Africa that are committed to the useful application of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) for the benefits of American and African people. The AGOA CSO Network's focus is on increasing the volume and quality of African products under AGOA, and educating stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean on the benefits of AGOA.

The Network was established by the 102 member organizations from the United States, Mauritius, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Namibia, Mali, Lesotho, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo that were in attendance during the AGOA Civil Society Forum on January 17, 2003, in Phoenix, Mauritius.

Mr. Chairman, and members, specifically, I am here to support petitions presented to this honorable committee by: Reverend Milenge Mwenelwata, President, AGOA Civil Society Network Chapter in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); Dr. Ngoie Joel Nshisso, International Business and Management Consultant, and member, AGOA Civil Society Organization Network Secretariat on behalf of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the call letter to President Donald J. Trump that was submitted by Richie Lontulungu, Executive Director, Higher Academy of the Congolese Civil Society.

The said petitions clearly state pertinent details of the Democratic Republic of Congo's AGOA history, i.e., designated as AGOA eligible by President Bill Clinton in 2003, and terminated as a beneficiary sub-Saharan African country by President Barak Obama on January 1, 2011, because of human rights violation, specifically, for the use of child soldiers and sexual violence as a weapon of war.

The extent of verifiable and compelling information provided by the three mentioned organizations regarding DRC's advancement since being terminated from the list of AGOA eligible sub-Saharan African countries, coupled with democratic gains made in DRC in the

last two years, including, the peaceful transfer of power from opposition leader Joseph Kabila Kabange to Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo in January of 2019 are major milestones and substantiate the fact the DRC has made continual progress in meeting requirements outlined in section 506A(a)(1) of the 1974 Trade Act .And at every step along the way, DRC's advancement was encouraged and supported by members of the Congolese civil society across the 26 provinces of one of the largest and most resource rich nations in the world.

According to Dr. Reverend Milenge Mwenelwata's testimony, "Taking into account all these objectives and good reasons, the DRC deserves and has qualified to be reintegrated into the AGOA. The country's reintegration will be beneficial to both the DRC and the U.S.A, as well as, to all member countries within AGOA. Indeed, the list of marketable products, as well as, strategic minerals, including Cobalt, Colten, Niobium and many others shows that the DRC provides tremendous business opportunities, a beneficial relationship with the U.S and the US nationals and strategic interests. The lawful exploitation and exports of mining will benefit both the Congolese and Americans while promoting regional and economic integration".

As an American election observer of the December 2018 elections in DRC that resulted in the peaceful transfer of power, 60 years after DRC's independence, I had the opportunity to engage with political, civil society and business leaders, and I am optimistic about the sustainability of the political reforms on going in the country.

Mr. Chairman, and members, We, the American people must support the expansion of free enterprise in DRC, today, so that ongoing political reforms can result in the creation of good paying jobs for the people of the DRC; improvement in social and economic conditions of the Congolese people, and the advancement of US-Africa trade and economic cooperation. Reinstatement of AGOA benefits will go a long way in helping Congolese businesses expand exports to the United States, and help Felix-Antoine Tsesekhedi Tshilombo's administration succeed.

In March 2019, the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network in partnership with the Christian Mutual Help Trade Union [Syndicate D' Entraide Chretienne (S.E.C. asbl)], established a chapter of AGOA Civil Society Organization Network in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and we are committed to advancing inclusive economic growth and development that assists in the advancement in peace and prosperity.

After careful consideration of the facts on the ground, the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network Secretariat, hereby respectfully request that this honorable committee grant the petitions of the people and the Government of the Democratic of the Congo for re-instatement of the benefits of the African Growth and Opportunity Act as of 2020.

I thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony, today, and ask that my full presentation be submitted for the record.