

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Congressman Jeff Fortenberry today spoke at a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights about the intense plight of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

"The intense human tragedy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to weigh heavily upon us, and the testimony today from the U.S. State Department, USAID, the Eastern Congo Initiative, Catholic Relief Services, and the Enough Project is important for the international community's sense of understanding of this plight," said Fortenberry. "It is especially poignant that today is International Women's Day, as we held this hearing for the hundreds of thousands of women in the DRC who have been heinously victimized in recent years, including the many women who must remain silent. Congress broke that silence today.

"Sexual violence toward the daughters of the Congo is the worst in the world, in both its pernicious scope and unrelenting brutality. While numerous signs of democratic progress have been seen in recent years, civil strife has reached an unfathomable high in some areas, particularly eastern Congo. The social emergency lies not only with the scourge of gender and sexual based violence in the DRC. As we give attention to the victimized women and girls of the DRC, we must also give special consideration to the plight of girl child soldiers, who are often victims of grotesque sexual slavery and violence as well. These girls, stripped of innocence and dignity, face heartbreaking stigma and unique challenges to reintegration by their families and communities.

"One tangible result of today's hearing was the expression of bipartisan support for the appointment of a special envoy to the DRC, and I will work with my colleagues on the subcommittee to press for this important diplomatic outreach."

Fortenberry is the Vice Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights.

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