

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

Fred Olagoke Oladeinde  
Chairman, AGOA Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network Secretariat  
1200 G Street NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20005  
Tel: 202-331-1333 Fax: 202-436-9477  
Website: [www.agoacsonetwork.org](http://www.agoacsonetwork.org)  
Email: [comments@democracy-africa.org](mailto:comments@democracy-africa.org)

Good morning Chairman Treat, and members of the implementation Subcommittee, 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](http://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 CSO 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, 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, due to 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, "All the reforms implemented since the Democratic Republic of Congo's exclusion from AGOA have had a great impact on improving the political, judicial, economic, security and human rights situation. In regards to sexual violence, the primary cause of the country's exclusion from AGOA, DRC's Head of State appointed a Special Representative to combat sexual violence and that representative's work led to DRC being removed from the United Nations' blacklist of sexual abuser nations.

As to human rights at large, the reforms in place have significantly reduced the intensity of armed conflicts and armed groups' activities that use to be the main driving force behind massive human rights violations, especially, sexual violence. The reforms have also led to the establishment of a national body (CNDH) to consistently monitor those violations. The drafting and passing of laws that promote and protect human rights; the decrease in human rights violation rate nationwide; the ending of arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions along with cruel and ill-treatment during detention; the fresh wave of more freedoms, including, the freedom of press and expression, freedom of assemblies and public demonstrations; and the progress made in respect to child and workers' rights have had a great impact on the country's progression."

For example:

1. March 2019 release by presidential pardon of 700 prisoners, including, Mr. Firmin Yangambi, a human rights activist and lawyer arrested in 2009 and sentenced to death in 2010 for illegally retaining war weapons and attempting to organize an insurgency; and Mr. Frank Diongo, an opposition leader arrested in 2016, and charged with kidnapping by the Kabila regime.
2. The closing of secret (undercover)prisons
3. The return of political opponents from exile
4. The freedom of expression and the reopening of closed news stations

5. The reestablishment of military cooperation between DRC, Belgium, France and the US
6. The introduction of non-fee paying public education at the primary and secondary levels
7. The creation of a special permanent body to combat corruption
8. Strengthening measures for the eradication of armed groups in Eastern DRC
9. The State's commitment to fight the Ebola epidemic
10. DRC membership into the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA)
11. Market economy development and improvement of the business environment
12. The implementation of a poverty reduction strategy
13. The lifting of the ban on public demonstration
14. The Establishment of the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH)
15. Removal of DRC Defense Forces from UN blacklist of national armies using children in their ranks August 2017
16. Freely organized protest marches in Kinshasa by workers in March and April 2019
17. Increase in daily minimum wage from \$1.00 to \$4.25

Taking into account the above accomplishments and others, DRC deserves and is qualified to be reintegrated into the list of AGOA eligible countries. The country's reintegration will be beneficial to both the DRC and the U.S.A, as well as, to eligible sub-Saharan countries.

As an American election observer during 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, NGO 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 DRC; improvement in the 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 the 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 of peace and prosperity throughout the country.

After careful consideration of the facts on the ground, the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network Secretariat, hereby respectfully requests 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.