

American Committee on Africa
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New York 17, New York

April 2, 1962

In support of United Nations in the Congo

We are gravely disturbed to note that negative and destructive criticisms by certain Americans are threatening the peace and fragile stability so recently established in the Congo.

A committee claiming to "aid Freedom Fighters" in Katanga is attempting to discredit United Nations motives and methods, while opposing the United States purchase of UN bonds in support of the Congo operation.

The UN Forces entered the Congo to restore order and overcome panic. Mandates to use force in pursuit of these goals were given only after repeated provocation from the Katanga authorities. No force has been used in some hundreds of incidents during the past year and a half precisely because unusual efforts were made to use persuasion and mediation.

The Katanga movement for secession, influenced strongly by European settlers with financial interests in mining operations, supplied a wedge for the possible spread of the cold war into Africa. UN action, involving troops from neutral nations, seeks to prevent outside intervention and assist the Africans to solve their own problems. In carrying out this mission, soldiers on their arrival are given instructions from the UN:

"You serve as members of an International Force. It is a Peace Force, not a fighting force. The UN has asked you to come here in response to an appeal from the Government of the Republic of the Congo. Your task is to help in restoring order and calm. . . You carry arms, but they are to be used only in self-defense. You are in the Congo to help everyone, to harm no one."

How correct UN goals were can be seen by the fact that the two main disputants eventually did get together to discuss a united Congo. This makes the present attempt of a small group of US citizens to undermine confidence all the more unfortunate. Those who would encourage the resumption of civil war in the Congo make two main charges against the UN operations: that UN intervention has been aggressive and that UN soldiers have committed atrocities.

In September of 1961 Dag Hammarskjold gave his life trying to stop the fighting. During the conflict in Elizabethville in December, many UN officials risked their lives trying to bring an end to combat. The decision to fight was not taken by the UN aggressively. It was thrust upon it by Katanga authorities.

The Elizabethville region of Katanga was a vast arsenal: hand and automatic weapons, small artillery, armored vehicles, fighter and bomber planes were in the possession of the 7,000-man army on the eve of hostilities. The backbone

of military leadership was largely in the hands of extremists, imported from Algeria after the failure of the OAS coup of April 1961. The mood of the dominant white population was hysterically anti-UN. To most of these settlers, any attempt to take away their privileged status would be interpreted as an aggressive act. Hence the bitterness of the accusation against the UN despite much evidence to the contrary.

The charge that the UN-controlled troops from neutral nations committed atrocities is also the result of local bitterness and hysteria. In two weeks of intense fighting in the outskirts of the city, according to Red Cross estimates, UN fire caused 32 settler deaths. Losses to UN personnel were far heavier. The fighting in Katanga was observed by a large number of correspondents representing many shades of political opinion. Had there been significant evidence for such extreme charges of atrocity, surely it would have been presented in the press before now.

Thoughtful Americans should pause and realize that on their judgment an important decision is at stake. Should they believe allegations, backed by little more than the highly partisan report of one observer whose judgment has already been seriously questioned? Or should they maintain reasonable confidence in the efforts of the United Nations to aid the Congolese quest for a political stability free from the perils of outside interference?

Signed:

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