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Department of Trade and Industry

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The Rt Hon Clare Short MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA


Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

*From The Minister of State for
Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs*

31 July 2006

Dear Clare,

Thank you for your letter of 13 July to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituent Mr David Forbes of Lifeline Options, Waterlinks Enterprise Centre, 69 Aston Road North, Birmingham, B6 4EA, about the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I am replying as Duty Minister in the Foreign Secretary's absence.

We share Mr Forbes' concerns about human rights in the DRC. The detention and trial of Pastors Kutino and Bomperere (and their three co-defendants) were tainted by several irregularities. These include the use of a military court rather than a civilian one, the court's refusal to allow defence lawyers to fulfil their duties, inconsistencies in prosecution witness statements and allegations that the police had fabricated evidence to secure a politically-motivated conviction. We, together with our international partners in the DRC, including the EU and UN, have registered our concerns with the Congolese government on several occasions. We continue to remind the Congolese government of its responsibilities to protect human rights and to allow freedom of expression, including criticism of the government and the President, during the election period and beyond.

As you know, the DRC is a fragile state emerging from years of brutal conflict. Achieving a peaceful and prosperous future for the Congolese people is a long-term goal to which we remain firmly committed.

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The Rt Hon Iain McCartney
Minister for Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs