



MEDIA RELEASE

From:

African Think Tank Inc.

WORKING WITH
VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY

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WORSENING ATROCITIES AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN CONGO DEMANDS IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

Victoria's African communities are increasingly alarmed at the deteriorating situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and are set to launch a campaign to raise awareness of the crisis and seek public support to save lives and help those in desperate need.

Chairperson of the DRC Community Association of Victoria (DRCCAV), Mr Clyde Salumu Sharady, said more than 250,000 persons had become refugees since the ongoing genocide of Congolese people took a further downturn in August, adding to an existing refugee population of almost 800,000.

"85% of the refugees are women and children," Mr Sharady said, "Cholera and malaria are rife. Many of the women have been forced into prostitution. There are hundreds of reported rape cases of these refugees every week. This entrenches the possibility of a wider spread of AIDS / HIV as well as new and exotic diseases, such as BSE (Mad Cow Disease), antibiotic-resistant tuberculosis, and the deadly Golden Staph."

DRCCAV is joining forces with the African Think Tank (ATT) to host a special educational forum at **Grattan Gardens Community Centre in Prahran on Thursday, 11 December 2008.**

"There's a clear need to educate the Australian public about the true extent of the crisis in the Congo," Mr Sharady explained, "and to kick-start a campaign that will save lives and help the needy."

Dr Berhan Ahmed, ATT Chairperson and a nominee for 2009 Australian of the Year, agreed urgent action was required.

"The situation for women and children in DRC is extremely grave when we realise that the funding for relief organisations effectively halved in real terms due to the doubling of prices for cereals and other basic commodities," Dr Ahmed said.

"UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) has such limited funds that it can do little other than to provide sacking for blankets for people who are sleeping in the open. *Medecins Sans Frontiers* is similarly stretched to provide basic medical advice. Oxfam is warning of the worst humanitarian crisis in decades."

"At this time of worldwide financial crisis, some argue that funding to aid organisations needs to be cut back," Dr Ahmed noted with concern. "In light of the willingness shown to make extra capital available to for economic purposes, to suggest otherwise when responding to a human crisis where the lives of 100,000 child are at risk borders on the unconscionable."

"Whether we are talking about finance, health, human rights, or infrastructure, we have to remember that now, more than ever before, we are one world – a complex, multi-dependent system, and any failure or crisis in one part of the planet eventually flows on and affects everyone."

The educational forum will take place at [TIME ??] at 40 Grattan St, Prahran. Further information is available by contacting Clyde Salumu Sharady on m) 0437 724 917 or email: drccav@bigpond.com.

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