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**Written statement* submitted by the Association for World Education,
a non-governmental organization on the Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 November 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Need for Reconciliation Bridge-Builders¹

The Association for World Educations welcomes this 8th Special Session of the Human Rights Council as violence is growing in the eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo, basically the administrative provinces of North and South Kivu. The violence could spread to the rest of the country as Angolan troops may come to the aid of the Central Government as they have in the past while Rwandan troops are said to be helping the opposing militia led by Laurent Nkunda. While Nkunda and his Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) say that they are only protecting the ethnic Tutsi living in Congo, Nkunda could emerge as a national opposition figure to President Joseph Kabila.

The United Nations has some 17,000 peacemakers in Congo (MONUC), the UN's largest peacekeeping mission, but their capacity is stretched to the limit. Their mission is to protect civilians, some 250,000 of which have been driven from their homes since the fighting intensified in late August 2008. Despite the MONUC troops, we note that there are large-scale occurrences of wilful violations of human rights and humanitarian law by all parties in the conflict, with massive displacement of populations, plundering of villages, systematic rape of women, summary executions and the use of child soldiers.

The eastern area of Congo is the scene of fighting at least since 1998 — in part as a result of the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda in 1994. We regret that efforts at reconciliation, reform and reconstruction have not been carried out in the eastern provinces. We note that the illicit exploitation of natural resources, the inability to deal with land tenure and land use issues, the lack of social services and of socio-economic development have created the conditions which lead to the current violence.

The people in eastern Congo have lived together for many centuries and had developed techniques of conflict resolution, especially between the two chief agricultural lifestyles: that of agriculture and cattle herding. However, recent economic and political factors have overburdened the local techniques of conflict resolution and have opened the door to new, negative forces interested only in making money and gaining political power.

UN peace-keeping troops are effective when there is peace to keep. What is required today in eastern Congo is not so much more soldiers under UN command, than reconciliation bridge-builders, persons who are able to restore relations among the ethnic groups of the area. The United Nations, national governments, and non-governmental organizations need to develop bridge-building teams who can help to strengthen local efforts at conflict resolution and re-establishing community relations. In the Kivus, many of the problems arise from land tenure issues. With the large number of people displaced and villages destroyed, it may be possible to review completely land tenure and land use issues.

We were among those in the early 1950s who stressed the need to create UN peace-keeping forces with soldiers especially trained for such a task. Today, a new type of world civil servant is needed — those who in areas of tension and conflict can undertake the slow but important task of restoring confidence among peoples in conflict, establishing contacts and looking for ways to build upon common interests.

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¹ Text: Rene Wadlow, Main Representative to the United Nations, Geneva of the Association for World Education.