



**Intervention by Msgr. John Putzer, Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other
International Organizations in Geneva
at the 48th Session of the Human Rights Council**

Enhanced interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on the final report of the team of international experts on the situation in Kasai

Geneva, 5 October 2021

Madam President,

The Holy See welcomes the reports of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and of the team of international experts on the situation in Kasai. We remain deeply concerned by the alarming human rights situation in the DRC, where violations and abuses continue to be documented by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office. The Holy See firmly condemns all acts of violence, especially those that result in the loss of life and all forms of sexual violence, and urges the local authorities to employ all efforts to ensure an end to such violence.

Madam President,

Several recent events, including the declaration of a state of siege in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, the deadly use of force in demonstrations concerning the candidacies for the future president of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), and the votes of no confidence made regarding the Governors of various provinces in the Kasai region, seem to confirm a “vicious cycle” that links political instability and situations of insecurity, with devastating consequences on the protection of human rights in the Country. Indeed, for several decades, in moments of political tension there has also been an increase in human rights violations, both by State and non-State actors.

The Holy See is particularly concerned by the attacks on the Catholic Church and Church institutions that have occurred across the country in the current process of the designation of the President of the CENI. As noted by the Catholic Episcopal Conference of the RDC (CENCO), the cases of desecration of several churches and places of worship, the storming of the residence of Cardinal Ambongo, the Archbishop of Kinshasa, and the uttering of derogatory remarks against the Cardinal by an official constitute “a serious attack on freedom of religion and expression, but also a violation of democracy.”¹ The Holy See notes that it is essential that this process be carried out in an authentically transparent, democratic and independent way, so that an effective consensus can be reached among the eight confessions

¹ DR Congo: Vandals target residence of Kinshasa's Archbishop, Vatican News, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2021-08/dr-congo-vandals-target-residence-of-kinshasa-archbishop.html>

composing the platform of religious denominations, charged with the designation of the President of the CENI.

The Holy See also calls on all stakeholders to ensure that the electoral process leading up to and including the 2023 presidential elections be carried out in a free, transparent, inclusive and democratic fashion. In particular, my Delegation is concerned with the so-called Tshiani draft legislation that risks to further destabilize and divide the country and undermine the credibility of the electoral process. Therefore, any attempt to modify the election process should be carried out in a non-discriminatory and transparent fashion, with the full engagement of civil society, and in conformity with the Constitution.

Madam President,

The Holy See is equally concerned about the ongoing insecurity, especially in the Eastern part of the country, where the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), recently designated as being associated with the Islamic State on the national list of terrorist groups of certain countries, have been carrying out targeted attacks on civilian populations, including the destruction of Catholic churches and camps of IDPs and Refugees. The increased activity of such extremist groups in Tanganyika, North and South Kivu and Ituri seems to represent a further step that consolidates the logistical and operational “corridor” between Sudan and Mozambique that facilitates the illegal transfer of munitions, including IEDs, and leads to an increase in terrorist activity and further destabilization of the region.

The humanitarian consequences of the prolonged conflict and instability in the East, as well as in the Kasai region, are devastating. The “scorched earth” policy employed by certain armed groups has resulted in the total destruction of 37 villages in South Kivu alone in the first half of 2021, forcing entire communities to seek domicile elsewhere. Currently, there are 5.2 million IDPs in the country, and thousands of Congolese refugees have been forcibly repatriated from Angola. Due in part to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, food scarcity is at an all-time high, and food prices have rapidly increased, precluding significant portions of the population from being able to have even one meal a day. The spread of the pandemic continues to be alarming – especially in prisons, which in some cases are filled to over 500% capacity – and the lack of equitable access to vaccinations hinders progress in this regard.

Madam President,

In conclusion, I would like to renew the heartfelt appeal of Pope Francis to “the conscience and the responsibility of the national authorities and of the international community, to take appropriate and timely decisions to rescue [the people of the DRC].”² Only with coordinated and constant efforts at the local, national, regional and international levels will we be able to put an end to the humanitarian and human rights crisis in the DRC and effectively protect the rights and dignity of the Congolese people.

Thank you, Madam President.

² Pope Francis, Angelus, 19 February 2017.