



Statement of Msgr. John Putzer
Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 54th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council

Item 10: 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 report of the international experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Geneva, 9 October 2023

Mr. President,

The Holy See welcomes the reports of the High Commissioner and the team of international experts on the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We remain deeply concerned about the alarming human rights situation in the DRC. 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 which result in the loss of life or in sexual assault. Earlier this year, during his visit to the DRC, Pope Francis stated that *“It is in God’s name that, together with the victims and all those who work for peace, justice and fraternity, I condemn the armed violence, the massacres, the rapes, the destruction and occupation of villages, and the looting of fields and cattle that continue to be perpetrated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [...] It causes indignation to know that the insecurity, violence and war that tragically affect so many people are disgracefully fuelled not only by outside forces, but also from within, for the sake of pursuing private interests and advantage”*¹.

Mr. President,

In addition to the scourge of the recruitment of child soldiers, the increased number and severity of attacks of the M23, the ADF and other armed groups in the Eastern part of the country is particularly unsettling. My Delegation is equally concerned about the reported attacks carried out by the national army, which have caused severe losses of life amongst civilians. At times these operations are exacerbated or influenced by foreign countries², and all together, the conflict has already led to an increase of nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million additional internally displaced persons in the first quarter of 2023 alone.³ In this regard, the Holy See echoes the recommendation of the team of international experts that all stakeholders “rapidly implement the decisions, recommendations and conclusions of the Nairobi and Luanda Processes and urges all armed groups to ensure effective disarmament.”⁴

Furthermore, the Holy See exhorts the entire international community not to underestimate the particularly grave threat posed by ADF’s continued attacks and growing extremist radicalization. With increasing frequency and ever more sophisticated weapons,

¹ Pope Francis, Meeting with victims of violence from the eastern part the country, Apostolic Nunciature (Kinshasa). 1 February 2023.

² Cf. A/HRC/54/76, n. 25.

³ Ibid., n. 29.

⁴ Ibid., n. 131.

the ADF targets Christian communities gathered in prayer, carrying out brutal and bloody attacks in the centre of villages. The international community should provide effective assistance to the Congolese authorities to face this real, atrocious and growing violence.

While welcoming the efforts of the Congolese authorities to increase the number and impartiality of judges in the country, the Holy See is concerned that a general state of impunity persists within the DRC, and that many victims of human rights violations do not receive a fair or speedy trial, if ever they receive one. This is all the more disturbing when the perpetrators of these violations are public figures.

With presidential elections scheduled to take place before the end of the year, the Holy See reiterates the importance of ensuring that all Congolese citizens have the right to express their political will in a safe, peaceful and transparent environment. In this regard, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO), together with the traditional protestant communities (ECC), are collaborating to train tens of thousands of independent observers to monitor and report on the electoral process. Such actors will be essential to ensure that the upcoming elections are credible, transparent and inclusive. The Holy See appeals to the Congolese authorities to ensure the security and civil and political freedoms of all, during this decisive period.

Mr. President,

It is necessary to encourage and help local authorities to create the conditions necessary for the development of their people and for citizens to understand that the future is in their hands, a future that requires the contribution of their intelligence and hard work.

In conclusion, allow me to renew the heartfelt appeal of Pope Francis during his recent trip to the DRC: *“one has the impression that the international community has practically resigned itself to the violence devouring it [the Congolese people]. We cannot grow accustomed to the bloodshed that has marked this country for decades, causing millions of deaths that remain mostly unknown elsewhere. What is happening here needs to be known. The current peace processes, which I greatly encourage, need to be sustained by concrete deeds, and commitments should be maintained. [... The citizens of the DRC] are infinitely more precious than any treasure found in this fruitful soil!”*⁵

Thank you, Mr. President.

⁵ Pope Francis, Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, Garden of the “*Palais de la Nation*” (Kinshasa), 31 January 2023.