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DR Congo: Crackdown on Protesters

Security Forces Used Excessive Force, Provided No Protection from Assailants

(Kinshasa) – Security forces in the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) used excessive force against protesters demonstrating against a proposed law that could extend [President Félix Tshisekedi's](#) term on June 12, 2026, Human Rights Watch said today.

The security forces used tear gas and batons in the capital, Kinshasa, to prevent a group of protesters created to defend the existing constitution from attending a sit-in in front of the parliament building. They also failed to protect members of the group from assault by a group linked to the main ruling party.

“Congolese security forces used unnecessary force against people who tried to exercise their right to criticize proposed changes to the constitution,” said [Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz](#), deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Instead of protecting the demonstrators, security forces instigated violence and left protesters vulnerable to assault by a pro-ruling party group.”

Between June 12-22, Human Rights Watch interviewed 38 people, including 15 from [Article 64 Coalition](#) for the defense of the constitutional order (Coalition Article 64, or C64) who were injured on June 12 and 7 from Force of Progress (Force du Progrès), a group [linked](#) to the main ruling party, Union for Democracy and Social Progress (Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social, or UDPS).

On June 11, the Kinshasa governor rejected an application from C64 to hold a sit-in in front of the parliament building, the Palace of the People (Palais du Peuple), and provided an alternative venue. The C64 members rejected this proposal. While the [Constitution](#) guarantees the right to peaceful assembly, [the law on demonstrations](#) empowers the authorities to prevent or disperse a meeting if it is a threat to public order and security.

Those interviewed said that on June 12, at about 10 a.m., Force of Progress members attacked the offices of several opposition political parties within the C64.

Human Rights Watch verified and geolocated videos showing members of Action for Democracy and Development in Congo ([Action pour la Démocratie et le Développement au Congo](#)) defending their headquarters against Force of Progress members. Images also show debris, broken glass on the building's floor, and a visibly injured woman in the office of the Alliance for Change (Alliance pour le Changement), and damage to the headquarters of the Innovative Forces for Unity and Solidarity (Forces Novatrices pour l'Union et la Solidarité).

Seven Force of Progress members interviewed said that main ruling party members told them to mobilize their supporters to prevent the sit-in. "We held the last meeting on the afternoon of Wednesday before the demonstration date [June 10] in Limete [10th Rue, Kinshasa] during which two of our party leaders clearly instructed us to target opposition leaders and their parties," one said.

"They [party members] promised to give us money if we disrupted the demonstration," said a Force of Progress member. "Many young people join the group because of the opportunities for informal jobs," another one said.

At around noon, C64 members gathered at the headquarters of the opposition party Commitment for Citizenship and Development Party (Engagement pour la Citoyenneté et le Développement, or ECiDé) on Triomphal Boulevard, then headed toward the parliament building.

Protesters said that the police set up three barricades close to the "Robot roundabout" in front of the building. As protesters approached the second barricade, the police threw tear-gas canisters and fired tear gas at them. Members of a task force comprising a special unit of the Congolese army, the [Republican Guard](#), and the intelligence services were also present, protesters said.

Protesters said that their march was peaceful until they reached the police barricades. "We raised our hands in the air as a sign of non-violence," one said.

"While walking along Triomphal, I heard a loud noise, felt my leg go heavy, and fell, and discovered that my foot was bleeding profusely," said a protester who was struck by a tear-gas canister.

Protesters said that Force of Progress members joined the security forces and threw stones and bottles at them, some filled with urine. They said they could identify the assailants as Force of Progress because they openly expressed their [affiliation](#) during the attacks. Two people said they recognized specific Force of Progress members because they had worked with them previously. Human Rights Watch also verified a [video](#) showing two men in civilian clothing expressing support for the Force of Progress alongside other men throwing stones and police throwing tear-gas canisters.

Witnesses said that some protesters retaliated by [throwing](#) stones at the security forces and Force of Progress members.

Many C64 members said they managed to seek safety at the ECiDé headquarters, but security forces and Force of Progress members followed them there and continued attacking them.

Both witness accounts and video evidence confirm a security forces and Force of Progress assault against the ECiDé headquarters while politicians and injured protesters were trapped inside. In a [video](#) verified by Human Rights Watch, police officers stand by as Force of Progress members throw projectiles toward the headquarters and try to force open its main gate. The video also shows a security force member throwing an apparent tear-gas canister over the headquarters' wall.

A [video](#) Human Rights Watch verified and geolocated shows a security force member firing a tear-gas canister at short range against the building.

Human Rights Watch documented injuries to more than a dozen protesters, including opposition leaders Martin Fayulu, Delly Sesanga, Jean-Marc Kabund, and Ados Ndombasi.

Security forces also arrested and detained several dozen protesters, according to the [National Human Rights Commission](#).

Congolese authorities [denounced](#) the violence, with the [justice minister](#) and the National Human Rights Commission interviewing C64 members to establish the facts. On June 19, the Prosecutor General's Office at the Court of Cassation (the final court of appeal in Congo) announced that it [had opened](#) an investigation into the incident.

On June 22, UDPS [filed](#) a complaint with the Court of Cassation seeking the initiation of legal proceedings against individuals for using the party's name, particularly those it accused of posing as Force of Progress, to commit abuses.

On July 3, the party's secretary general, Augustin Kabuya, told Human Rights Watch that the party had never sent anyone to commit violence, and that a [fake](#) Force of Progress is tarnishing the party's name.

The United Nations [Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials](#) state that security forces shall "apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force." In the dispersal of assemblies that are unlawful but nonviolent, law enforcement officials avoid the use of force or "restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary."

"The Congolese government's investigation into the June 12 crackdown is a positive step, but it needs to be independent and impartial to ensure accountability," Budoo-Scholtz said. "Those responsible should be held to account irrespective of political party affiliation to show that justice can prevail over politics."

