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21 October 2016 - State agents, such as police and armed forces, used excessive - including lethal - force during demonstrations in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), last month, when at least 53 people were killed over two days, 143 injured and more than 299 unlawfully arrested, a United Nations preliminary investigation revealed today.

The probe, carried out by the Joint Human Rights Office of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([MONUSCO](#)) [documented](#) 422 victims of human rights violations, including of the right to life, to physical integrity, to the liberty and security of the person, peaceful assembly and expression, according to a [news release](#) from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

The figures do not reflect the full extent of the violations, as the UN teams were denied access to official records of some morgues and public hospitals as well as various detention facilities, including two key facilities where many of those arrested and many dead bodies were reportedly taken. Investigations are ongoing.

Of the 53 people documented killed, including seven women and two children, at least 48 were killed by State agents, including the National Police (PNC) and soldiers of the *Garde Républicaine* (GR) and the National armed forces (FARDC). Perpetrators were not identified in the killing of four police officers and one woman.

The vast majority of the victims - 38 of them - were shot dead, according to the preliminary investigation. Many of them were shot in the head, chest and back, including a five-year-old girl who was shot in the back, the report states. Others died after being burned, stabbed, beaten or attacked with machetes. Of the 143 documented as injured, 75 were victims of the excessive use of force by State agents while 68 were injured by unknown perpetrators.

The report documents the harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention of local and international journalists, as well as the destruction and looting of the premises of eight political parties. The report also documents reports of violence by demonstrators. Of the four police officers killed, three were beaten to death and one burned alive.



Special Representative and head of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) Maman Sidikou (centre) greeting children of Oicha, North Kivu. Photo: MONUSCO/Abel Kavanagh

MONUSCO chief Maman Sidikou urged Congolese authorities to conduct prompt, thorough, independent, credible and impartial investigations into the very serious human rights violations documented in the report.

Widespread impunity

Mr. Sidikou raised deep concerns about the widespread impunity that prevails in the country, highlighting the findings of another UN report released today which reveals that a very low number of State agents, especially senior officers, and leaders and combatants of armed groups, are prosecuted and convicted in the DRC for human rights violations.

"While there has been progress, and some 447 FARDC soldiers and 155 PNC officers have been convicted in relation to human rights violations committed between January 2014 and March 2016, widespread impunity continues," Mr. Sidikou said.

"Strong political will is needed to ensure justice and reparation to all victims of serious violations. This is particularly crucial in this volatile pre-electoral context," he continued, adding that effective justice is a major deterrent for future violations of human rights and the "cornerstone" for peace and stability.

The [report on accountability](#) cites the fragile legal framework and the lack of judicial independence and resources as major challenges to the prosecution of perpetrators.

In light of the growing number of human rights violations committed by police officers, particularly in the pre-electoral context, the report calls on the Congolese authorities to urgently develop and implement a strategy to prosecute the perpetrators, and to send a clear "zero tolerance" message to end human rights violations by State agents.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein expressed deep concern at the mounting number of very serious human rights violations by State security officers in recent months. He urged the authorities to prioritise justice and accountability for serious human rights violations and remedy for the victims.

"Impunity for serious human rights violations - including the shooting, hacking and mass arrests of protestors - has been a chronic problem in the DRC for decades now," Mr. Zeid said.

"This is clearly outrageous and serves to fuel an already explosive situation in the country. While the rate of prosecutions appears to be rising, new violations continue to be perpetrated with alarming frequency," he added, urging the Government to urgently take measures to defuse the tensions in the country, particularly by freeing all those detained for exercising their rights to peaceful assembly, association and expression.

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