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2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Democratic Republic of the Congo

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by armed groups or the armed forces, including by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom; and the significant presence of the worst forms of child labor.

The government took some steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Armed nongovernmental forces continued to commit abuses in the eastern provinces. Large-scale abuses by the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo, ISIS-Democratic Republic of Congo, also known as Allied Democratic Forces, the Rwanda-backed March 23 Movement, and other groups persisted across large parts of North Kivu and Ituri Provinces, as well as areas of South Kivu Province. Abuses included unlawful killings, abductions and disappearances, physical abuse and other mistreatment, destruction of government and private property, and sexual violence, widespread even in areas with no active hostilities, by members of armed groups. Armed groups also reportedly unlawfully recruited, abducted, and retained child soldiers and subjected children and adults to forced labor. There were no reports the government investigated or prosecuted such actions. In July, the United Nations Group of Experts report confirmed Rwanda's role as a key driver of the sustained military occupation of vast swaths of the country's territory. The Group of Experts also concluded Rwanda exercised de facto control and direction of the March 23 Movement's operations, giving material, operational, and logistical support to the group and 3,000 to 4,000 Rwandan military troops conducted military operations within the borders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the year. The March 23 Movement continued attacks against the country's security forces and, as of September, remained in control of a portion of North Kivu Province equivalent to one-third the size of Rwanda.

Section 1.

Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. Members of the state security forces (SSF) were accused of, tried for, and convicted of arbitrary or unlawful killings, mostly in conflict-affected provinces such as Maniema, South Kivu, Ituri, Tanganyika, and North Kivu, and in operations against armed groups (see section 1.c.). Although the military justice system convicted some members of the SSF responsible for human rights abuses, impunity remained a serious problem.

Armed groups committed arbitrary and unlawful killings throughout the year. On June 7, ISIS-Democratic Republic of the Congo (ISIS-DRC) members reportedly raided the villages of Masala, Mahili, and Keme armed with firearms and bladed weapons. These armed actors were disguised as *Wazalendo* (patriot in Swahili) fighters who had come to secure the village. At least 41 civilians and one Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) soldier were reported to have been killed in Masala, the majority by beheading.

Marginalized ethnic communities were perpetrators and victims of arbitrary and unlawful killings. Conflict with armed groups, tensions concerning land rights, and migration exacerbated long-standing ethnic divisions.

Media reports of Rwanda's support to the March 23 Movement (M23) armed group contributed to violence and discrimination against Rwandophones (both Kinyarwanda and Kirundi speakers) and those with a perceived sympathy for Rwanda or M23. Rwandophone populations were also accused of perpetrating violence against other ethnic communities.

The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) reported at least 1,344 civilians were victims of summary or extrajudicial killings in the first six months of the year, the vast majority occurring in conflict-affected provinces. Of the total cited by the UNJHRO, 89 were children. The armed groups ISIS-DRC, the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO), M23, and Mai Mai reportedly committed most of these killings and mutilations, while FARDC soldiers and Congolese National Police (PNC) officers contributed to the abuses. Among all armed groups operating in the country, ISIS-DRC reportedly killed the most civilians during the year. In June alone, the group reportedly was responsible for at least 271 civilian deaths (more than four times the average monthly number of civilians killed by ISIS-DRC in 2023). For example, the UN Group of Experts reported that between January and March more than 30 incidents of explosive weapons used by RDF and M23 and the FARDC caused civilian casualties. The majority of these occurred in areas with high concentrations of internally displaced persons. More than 50 civilians were killed, hundreds were injured, and civilian infrastructure was destroyed.

Armed groups' efforts to control the flow of conflict minerals (tantalum and gold) were also reasons for arbitrary killings. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) reported that in January – while the DRC's most productive tantalum mine was under control of the Coalition des Patriotes résistants congolais (PARECO) armed group – PARECO killed three artisanal tantalum miners for refusing to pay an illegal tax of 1,000 Congolese francs (CDF) (\$0.36).

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses

There were credible reports armed groups and the SSF perpetrated serious human rights abuses.

In the first half of the year, the UNJHRO documented a total of 2,355 human rights abuses across the country, with the majority occurring in conflict-affected provinces, particularly North Kivu and Ituri, but also South Kivu, Mai Ndombe and Tanganyika. Conflict-affected provinces accounted for more than 90 percent of all abuses reported throughout the country. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported the SSF committed abuses under the cover of the state of siege in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces.

The SSF continued fighting armed groups in the east of the country, and conflict among armed groups resulted in significant population displacement and human rights abuses, especially in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces. A UN Group of Experts report released in July noted M23's territorial expansions and operations led to the displacement of more than one million civilians in North Kivu Province between October 2022 and April. The Group of Experts also revealed evidence of sustained, direct intervention by the Rwandan Defense Force (RDF) on DRC territory to reinforce and train M23 combatants and to plan and conduct military operations against the armed group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

There were credible reports elements within the FARDC collaborated with some armed groups. The UN Group of Experts report from July detailed the FARDC's use of multiple armed groups as proxies to fight M23, in addition to a meeting of 48 armed group leaders with senior government officials in Kinshasa on April 8 at the request of President Félix Tshisekedi.

The government took steps to neutralize armed groups and fight impunity. Operational cooperation between MONUSCO and the government continued in the east, to include joint operations aimed against CODECO and the protection of civilians in Djugu territory. Operations faced coordinated challenges with the FARDC as well as obstruction on several occasions by M23, FARDC, and Wazalendo fighters. The M23 conflict and RDF presence diverted government resources and hampered collaboration in North Kivu between the FARDC and Ugandan military forces (Uganda Peoples' Defense Force) under Operation Shujaa, to counter ISIS-DRC.

Among the 15 major armed groups in the country ISIS-DRC, M23, various Mai Mai factions, and CODECO perpetrated the most abuses, according to a UNJHRO report covering the first half of the year. Armed groups committed approximately 56 percent of documented cases of human rights abuses in conflict-affected provinces in the first half of the year, according to the UNJHRO. Combatants abducted victims for ransom, for child and forced labor, and in retaliation for suspected collaboration. The UNJHRO reported armed groups used extrajudicial killings as a tactic to force populations to abandon their property, crops, or areas vital for agriculture and mining.

Credible reports indicated armed groups deliberately targeted health-care facilities and medical personnel and intentionally deprived civilian populations of food, water, and humanitarian aid. Fighting between the FARDC and armed groups, as well as armed groups fighting amongst themselves, displaced populations and limited humanitarian access, particularly in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Mai-Ndombe, and Tanganyika Provinces. The government took steps to assist displaced persons, including by coordinating with nongovernmental humanitarian organizations, UN agencies, and MONUSCO on internally displaced person (IDP) protection and humanitarian assistance.

The illegal trade in minerals financed armed groups and individual elements of the SSF. Elements of the SSF and certain armed groups continued to control, extort, and threaten remote mining areas in North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, and Haut Katanga Provinces and the Kasai region. Most notably, in April, M23 seized control of eastern DRC's lucrative Rubaya mining site, one of the world's most valuable coltan (tantalum ore) deposits.

Section 2.

Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government did not always respect this right. Public criticism of government officials and corruption sometimes resulted in intimidation, threats, or arrests. Provincial governments also

prevented journalists from filming or covering certain protests. The UNJHRO reported journalists and human rights defenders regularly faced arbitrary arrests.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

The SSF frequently subjected journalists to violence, harassment, and intimidation, both online and offline, due to their reporting. Impunity for such abuses, due to corruption, remained a problem. Authorities engaged in rhetoric that had the effect of limiting freedom of expression by members of the press. For example, in February in Mbandaka, Equateur Province, the PNC detained 21 journalists during a demonstration against the attack on the provincial director of the state-owned media network, RTNC, a few days earlier by the provincial governor's bodyguards.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

The law mandated the Superior Council for Audio-Visual Communication (CSAC) to provide for freedom of the press and equal access to communications media and information for political parties, associations, and citizens. While the CSAC was the only institution with legal authority to restrict broadcasts, the government, including the SSF and provincial officials, also de facto exercised this power. In a March decision, the CSAC prohibited media and journalists from covering or broadcasting any information concerning rebel forces without referring to official sources.

Many journalists exercised self-censorship due to concerns of harassment, intimidation, or arrest. Media representatives reported they were pressured by provincial authorities not to cover certain events, including those organized by the opposition or local activists. Journalist Stanis Bujakera was the first journalist to be tried under the Digital Code, which prohibited the intentional or unjustified dissemination of false information. In March, Bujakera was convicted and sentenced to six months in prison. He was released the following day having already served six months in detention.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The constitution and law provided all workers, including those in both the informal and formal sectors, except top government officials, judges, and SSF members, the right to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively. The law also provided for the right of most workers to conduct legal strikes. The law gave administrative authorities the right to dissolve, suspend, or deregister trade union organizations. It granted unions the right to conduct activities without interference, although it did not define interference. In the private sector, a minimum of 10 employees was required to form a union within a business, and a single business could include members of more than one union.

The law stipulated that unions and employers should adhere to lengthy compulsory arbitration and appeal procedures before union-initiated strikes. At times, however, workers conducted strikes without adhering to these lengthy compulsory arbitration and appeal procedures. Throughout the year, there were strikes and protests by teachers, truck drivers, labor inspectors, and various other public servants due to salary nonpayment. For example, after the Ministry of Labor and Labor Inspectorate recruited 2,379 labor inspectors and controllers in 2023, as of December the vast majority of the labor inspectors had not been paid. The government admitted it failed to allocate salaries for the expanded workforce in the 2024 budget approved by parliament.

Judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals. The law considered those who had worked for a minimum of three continuous months as workers and thereby protected by relevant labor law. Unless they were part of a union, most workers in agricultural activities and artisanal mining, domestic and migrant workers, and workers in export-processing zones were unfamiliar with their labor rights and did not often seek redress when employers breached applicable labor laws.

The government did not effectively enforce laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. In small and medium-sized businesses, workers could not properly exercise the right to strike. Government and employers did not respect the right of freedom of association and collective bargaining protections, and penalties were rarely applied against violators. Due to lax enforcement of labor regulations and lack of capacity for the General Labor Inspectorate, companies and shops could immediately replace any workers attempting to unionize, bargain collectively, or strike with contract workers to intimidate the workers and prevent them from exercising their rights, despite legal protections. Antiunion discrimination was widespread, particularly in foreign-owned companies. In many instances companies refused to negotiate with unions and negotiated individually with workers to undermine collective bargaining efforts. Despite collective agreements on union dues, employers often did not remit union dues or did so irregularly.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The government set regional minimum wages for all workers in private enterprise, with the highest minimum wages applied to the cities of Kinshasa and Lubumbashi. The minimum wages were above the poverty line. In the public sector the government set wages annually by decree and permitted unions to act only in an advisory capacity.

Rising cost of living made the minimum wage a key point of contention for workers and unions. When the minimum wage was set in 2019, it converted to \$4.34. Due to significant inflation, buying power declined by almost half (42 percent decrease) since 2020, leaving the value at CDF 7,075 (\$2.54). Unions advocated to the government and private sector for a minimum wage indexed to inflation, as opposed to the fixed rate that left workers vulnerable to currency fluctuation. Despite the efforts of Intersyndicale – a coordinated association of unions representing various sectors – the government took no action during the year to increase the minimum wage across the country.

The law defined different standard workweeks, ranging from 45 hours per week to 72 hours every two weeks, for various jobs and prescribed rest periods and premium pay for overtime. The law did not prohibit compulsory overtime.

Occupational Safety and Health

The labor code specified health and safety standards, but they had not been updated in many years. Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for some of the main industries in the country. The government did not often proactively identify unsafe conditions or respond to workers' OSH complaints. Local and international NGOs regularly identified unsafe conditions, particularly in the artisanal mining sector.

The mining code and Ministry of Mines' validation processes included criteria on minimal safety standards, such as prohibiting children and pregnant women from being on mining sites. Nonetheless, the law did not allow workers to remove themselves from hazardous situations without putting their employment in jeopardy. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations.

There were reports armed groups forced adults to work in the production of cobalt ore in some mines in the Copperbelt region, particularly in Haut-Katanga and Lualaba Provinces. Reports from civil society organizations, field research, and other sources found forced labor indicators including inability to refuse hazardous work, abusive overtime requirements, denial of rights or threats of dismissal, and withholding of wages or other promised benefits.

Further, some workers had informal financial relationships with intermediaries or sponsors, and in some cases these relations created vulnerability to wage manipulation, debt bondage, or other abuses. This dynamic was reported in the copper/cobalt, tantalum, and gold sectors.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. The General Inspectorate of Labor had the primary responsibility of enforcing wage, hour, and OSH laws. Labor inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate penalties. The Ministry of Labor hired 2,379 labor inspectors, controllers, and support staff in November 2023; however, salary nonpayment and lack of adequate training created impediments to the Labor Inspectorate in monitoring or enforcing wage and hour rules across economic sectors. Most businesses in both the formal and informal sectors – particularly in construction, mining, and agriculture – were not in compliance with minimum wage and maximum work hour regulations but faced few penalties.

Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations and were seldom applied. The Ministry of Labor did not employ sufficient labor inspectors or comptrollers to enforce consistent compliance with labor regulations. Workplaces in rural areas were almost never inspected.

Labor laws applied to the informal sector but were rarely applied. The country's trade union confederation estimated that the informal economy employed more than 97 percent of all workers, who worked in subsistence agriculture, informal commerce or mining, or other informal pursuits, where they often faced hazardous or exploitative working conditions.

The country had a very large artisanal and small-scale mining workforce, employing approximately two million persons according to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Most mining accidents resulting in injuries and fatalities occurred in this largely informal sector due to the government's lack of regulation and supervision. Some cobalt miners were forced to work in improperly reinforced tunnels at risk of collapsing, with poor ventilation and little protective equipment.

Across the mining sector, workers were vulnerable to forced labor due to the lack of alternative livelihoods, and there were reports workers faced threats of dismissal for complaining about labor conditions.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were reports of enforced disappearances during the year by or on behalf of government authorities. Authorities often refused to acknowledge the detention of suspects and sometimes detained suspects in unofficial facilities, including on military bases and in detention facilities operated by the Republican Guard, National Intelligence Agency (ANR), and military intelligence

services. The whereabouts of some human rights defenders, civil society activists and civilians arrested by the SSF remained unknown for long periods. The government did not make any efforts to prevent, investigate or punish these acts.

Armed groups abducted numerous persons, generally for forced labor, military service, or sexual slavery. Many of these victims disappeared.

UN agencies and NGOs reported armed groups abducted noncombatants to perform forced labor or guide them, or to ransom them. Armed groups also utilized abductions as reprisal for a victim's alleged collaboration with security and defense forces or rival groups, or because of their refusal to pay illegal taxes or to participate in so-called community work. The UNJHRO reported that from January through June, a total of 387 children were abducted from the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika. The armed groups ISIS-DRC, M23, and CODECO were responsible for most abductions.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest or detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally did not observe these requirements.

In Goma on August 1, men in civilian clothing arrested human rights defenders Jack Sinzahera and Gloire Saasita while giving interviews at Goma's Higher Institute of Commerce. At year's end, the two were still being held without charges and without being brought before a judge, although the law required this to occur within 48 hours of arrest.

By law, arrests for offenses punishable by more than six months' imprisonment required warrants. Detainees had to appear before a magistrate within 48 hours. The law required authorities to inform those arrested of their rights and the reasons for their arrest, and they could not arrest a family member in lieu of the suspected individual. Authorities had to allow arrested individuals to contact their families and consult with attorneys. Security officials, however, routinely violated all these requirements.

While the law provided for a bail system, it generally did not function. Detainees who were unable to pay for a lawyer were rarely able to access legal counsel. Authorities often held suspects incommunicado, including in unofficial detention centers run by the Republican Guard, the ANR, and military intelligence services, and refused to acknowledge these detentions. Additionally, many detainees were held in pretrial detention with no charges ever being filed.

Security personnel arrested and detained civil society activists, peaceful protesters, journalists, and opposition party members and sometimes denied them due process, including holding them incommunicado and without charge for extended periods. Police sometimes arbitrarily arrested and detained persons without filing charges to extort money from family members. Persons without national identification cards were sometimes arbitrarily arrested by the SSF.

For example, ANR agents arrested prominent human rights defenders Fred Bauma and Bienvenue Matumo following a peaceful protest in Kinshasa on February 3. Both were released after three days and were reportedly subjected to physical abuse while in detention.

Prolonged pretrial detention, ranging from months to years, was a problem. Those who were supposed to go before a magistrate were often detained locally in a clandestine holding facility and kept there for many months, leaving their families to presume they were dead. Judicial inefficiency, administrative obstacles, corruption, and staff shortages also caused trial delays. In many cases, the length of pretrial detention equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3.

Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports government officials employed them.

During the year, there were credible reports the SSF subjected individuals, including minority groups and journalists, to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment. Security forces also abused children who lived or worked on the streets.

Security forces subjected individuals, including members of minority groups, to rape and sexual abuse.

Impunity among the SSF for mistreatment was a problem, although the government made limited progress in holding security forces accountable for human rights abuses. For example, on March 15, the Tshikapa garrison military court sentenced a PNC officer accused of raping a child to seven years in prison and a fine of 800,000 CDF (\$288). Civil society organizations and former prisoners alleged torture was prevalent in most detention facilities.

Sexual violence was often used as a tactic of war, and armed groups, the FARDC, the PNC, and the ANR perpetrated widespread sexual violence. From January through June, the UNJHRO documented 146 cases of sexual violence affecting 166 adult women.

According to a June UN report, there were 15 allegations of sexual abuse or exploitation committed by MONUSCO between 2005 and 2024, involving four UN civilian staff members, two police personnel, and nine military personnel currently or previously deployed to MONUSCO or the UN Mission in the DRC. As of September, the cases involving military personnel were pending completion of an investigation by their respective troop-contributing countries. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services was investigating the cases involving police and civilian personnel.

Various armed groups were known to physically abuse artisanal miners to maintain influence over the production and trade of conflict minerals. When the Rubaya tantalum mine in North Kivu was under PARECO control, MONUSCO found higher levels of physical abuse, violence, and harassment than when it was under control of M23.

b. Protection of Children

The UNJHRO documented that at least 125 children were victims of various types of sexual violence in the first half of the year, with at least 29 percent of these assaults attributable to state agents, primarily the FARDC, PNC, and ANR. Almost half of the conflict-related sexual violence

documented took place in North Kivu (47 percent). Forty-six percent of the cases documented by UNJHRO in North Kivu Province were committed by M23.

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings> .

Child Soldiers

Throughout the year, there were reports of widespread recruitment or use of children by various armed groups, including nonstate armed groups supported by the government. According to the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, the United Nations verified cases of more than 500 children used in combat. There were also reports child soldiers, particularly girls, faced sexual exploitation.

The government cooperated with the United Nations on the implementation of screening and age assessment mechanisms, which resulted in no verified cases during the year of the unlawful recruitment or use of children by the armed forces, police, or other security forces.

The Secretary of State determined that elements of the Democratic Republic of the Congo armed forces provided support to armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers during the reporting period of April 2023 to March 2024. See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Child Marriage

While the law required parental consent of the marriage of persons younger than 18, it was not effectively enforced by the government; many marriages of underage children took place, in part due to continued social acceptance. Provisions in the law did not clarify who had standing to report forced marriage as a crime or if a judge had the authority to do so. The constitution criminalized forced marriage, along with a law promulgated in 2022 criminalizing trafficking in persons.

In IDP camps, girls were frequently at risk for sexual exploitation, abuse, sex trafficking, and forced marriage. Girls were also exposed to threats of sexual violence while waiting in line for latrines or for drinking water. In some cases, there were reports of transactional sexual relations with camp officials or other community members for access to food or drinking water.

c. Protection to Refugees

Through the National Commission for Refugees, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, the government cooperated closely with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Continuing conflict in the provinces of North and South Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika subjected refugees and IDPs to attacks, often resulting in deaths and further displacement. UNHCR reported Rwandan refugees in the Masisi Territory, North Kivu, were subject to cyclical displacement as a result of FARDC and armed group operations and were forced to relocate to South Kivu Province. As a result of conflict, refugees reported a range of human rights abuses and instances of forced displacement, according to UNHCR. There was a widespread perception by many Congolese that Rwandan refugees were either aligned with or supported the FDLR, an armed group whose original founders included some perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, or the M23, and they were discriminated against, harassed, and subjected to arbitrary detention during military operations to a

greater extent than the general population. UNHCR also reported elements of the Imbonerakure, the Burundian ruling party youth group, harassed Burundian refugees in the DRC.

Incursions by South Sudanese forces into Aru Territory and Ituri Province took place during the year. The incursions affected security for South Sudanese asylum seekers and refugees as well as local populations. Sexual violence continued to be a problem for refugees and asylum seekers.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees. The law, which allowed for flexibility, provided civil rights to refugees and citizens on an equal basis. UNHCR worked with the government to bring its refugee status determination system up to international standards and increase its efficiency and effectiveness, although delays in adjudication of cases continued. Because the Appeals Commission had not been convened in years, rejected asylum seekers remained in limbo. UNHCR assisted the government in implementing biometric registration of refugees and issuing refugee identification cards. According to UNHCR, as of July 31, the government had biometrically registered 223,236 refugees and asylum seekers.

The government assisted in the safe, voluntary return of former Congolese refugees. Government authorities did not treat refugees differently from citizens.

Resettlement

UNHCR worked with the government to voluntarily repatriate 7,907 persons between January and July 31, including 622 Rwandan refugees, 54 Burundian refugees, and 7,231 refugees from the Central African Republic.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The country had a very small Jewish population. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents during the year.