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World Report 2025 - Democratic Republic of Congo

In December 2023, President Félix Tshisekedi was elected for a second term amid a deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation. Authorities cracked down on opposition members, civil society activists, critics, and journalists throughout 2024.

Hostilities in North Kivu led to [significant displacement of populations](#), disrupted [humanitarian aid delivery](#), and created food [shortages](#) in Goma, the provincial capital. The warring parties – the national army and allied militias and Rwandan troops and the M23 armed group – [killed civilians](#), [committed abuses against camp residents](#), and increased risks faced by internally displaced people. The Rwandan army and the M23 indiscriminately shelled populated areas.

Civic, Media, and Political Space

The authorities targeted real or perceived critics, including through apparently politically motivated arrests, detentions, and prosecutions. The authorities repressed those independently reporting on the conflict in the east and used martial law, in place in North-Kivu and Ituri [since 2021](#), to curtail freedom of expression.

The national media regulator [restricted](#) reporting on the conflict in the east.

In November, political opponent and former presidential candidate Seth Kikuni was [sentenced](#) to one year in prison for “propagating rumors” and “incentivizing civil disobedience.” In September, he had been arrested and allegedly detained by intelligence services, with [no apparent access](#) to his legal counsel and family for days, and was [transferred](#) to Makala Central Prison in Kinshasa, the capital, despite being in poor health.

In October, Tshisekedi proposed [steps](#) to amend the country’s constitution. Rights groups and [the political opposition](#) criticized the move, fearing that Tshisekedi was seeking to [bypass the constitutional two-term limit](#).

In August, human rights defenders Jack Sinzahera and Gloire Saasita, who held a news conference to criticize the “state of siege,” were [held without charge for weeks](#). Both were released on November 8.

In May, unidentified men [abducted](#) Gloria Sengha, a civil society activist, along with two colleagues, Robert Bunda and Chadrack Tshadio, after a meeting in Kinshasa. Tshadio was released days after the abduction while Sengha and Bunda were [released](#) on July 4.

In [July](#), the media regulator [suspended journalist Jessy Kabasele](#) following a radio interview he conducted with Koffi Olomide, a singer, in which Olomide criticized the army's response to the M23. The media regulator blamed Kabasele for inadequately reframing Olomide's speech, arguing his criticism "undermines the enormous efforts and sacrifices made by the government."

In July, activist Fortifi Lushima was [abducted](#) by unidentified men after criticizing on television the government's response to the conflict. He was released days later.

In March, after being [convicted on charges believed to be baseless](#) and spending six months in prison, Stanis Bujakera, deputy director of the online news outlet [Actualite.cd](#) and reporter for [Jeune Afrique](#), was released.

In February, activists Fred Bauma and Bienvenu Matumo were [arrested](#) following a public gathering on the M23 occupation. Both were [released](#) after two nights in detention.

Armed Conflict in the East

Over 100 armed groups are active in eastern Congo, mainly in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu. The M23 armed group, which re-emerged in late 2021 with [Rwandan government support](#), took territory across North Kivu, effectively encircling Goma.

The UN [reported](#) on both Rwandan and Ugandan troops providing support to the M23, with the Rwandan army taking a direct role in hostilities against Congolese forces.

The accelerated withdrawal of the United Nations peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) requested by Tshisekedi in September 2023 had not been completed at time of writing. The Southern African Development Community mission was [deployed](#) in December 2023 "to restore peace and security in the eastern [Congo]."

The Congolese military and allied coalition of abusive militias known as "Wazalendo" ("patriots" in Swahili) were credibly implicated in [laws-of-war violations](#) in combatting the Rwandan army and the M23.

In April, 48 leaders of armed groups [travelled](#) to Kinshasa to discuss the Wazalendo coalition and collaboration with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The Congolese government supports Wazalendo and FDLR to fight alongside Congolese forces.

On January 25, the Congolese army fired at least two rounds of heavy artillery into Mweso, Masisi territory—which Rwandan and M23 forces held—[killing at least 19 civilians](#), and hitting close to the town's hospital.

In addition, the Congolese military placed military objectives, including artillery positions, close to displacement sites, putting civilians at unnecessary risk by exposing them to counterfire from opposing belligerent parties.

Both Congolese soldiers and Wazalendo fighters opened fire inside displacement camps, killing and injuring civilians. Wazalendo elements also detained and extorted civilians.

The Rwandan military and the M23 committed grave laws-of-war violations as they gained control of areas closer to Goma. Between January and September, the Rwandan military and the M23 launched at least five apparently unlawful attacks, striking populated areas near Goma, including displacement camps.

Both warring parties have raped women.

Armed men presence inside displaced camps and the need for women to look for food outside of camps increased insecurity and put women at heightened risk of sexual violence. In August, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) [said](#) more than 1 in 10 young women in camps reported being raped between November 2023 and April 2024.

The Angolan and Kenyan governments led mediation efforts between Congo and Rwanda, with backing from the [African Union](#).

In Ituri, the Zaïre and Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo (CODECO) armed groups resumed hostilities, with CODECO regularly clashing with the Congolese military and UN-peacekeeping soldiers. According to the [UN](#) and [media reports](#), CODECO fighters attacked civilians, displacement sites, and humanitarian personnel.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) intensified attacks against urban centers and killed civilians. According to the [UN](#), the ADF is the armed group responsible for the highest number of killings in Congo, mainly civilians.

Justice and Accountability

In September, at least 129 prisoners [died](#), including 24 shot while trying to escape, and 59 were injured during an attempted prison break at Makala Central Prison. The government announced that a commission would be created to establish the facts around the incident although, at time of writing, no such commission had been established. Makala, like many prisons across Congo, has massive [overcrowding](#), poor infrastructure, and inadequate resources.

An internal report by the UN Population Fund [found that](#) 268 out of the 348 women held in Makala prison—nearly 80 percent—were victims of rape and other sexual violence during the attempted

prison break. The report noted that 17 of the survivors of sexual violence were younger than 19. Sexual violence has been a [longstanding problem](#) in Congo's prisons.

A May 19 [attempted coup led to the deaths](#) of at least two security guards, one civilian, and several coup participants. In September, a military court in Kinshasa handed down [death sentences to 37 people](#)—including several foreigners—associated with the failed coup. The government had announced in March that it was ending a 20-year moratorium on the death penalty. Following the announcement, about 80 people were sentenced to death between May and August, sparking an outcry from rights groups. No executions had been conducted at time of writing.

In May, the trial of armed group members, politicians, and representatives of Congolese security forces for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in 2017-2018 [opened](#) before a military court in the Kasai province.

Cooperation with the United Nations

Congo [will join](#) the UN Human Rights Council as a member in January 2025, creating an additional [responsibility](#) for the authorities to uphold the highest standards for human rights protection.

In November, the universal periodic review of Congo's at the UN showed that the government made little progress in addressing widespread rights issues. The government has until the next UNHRC session in early 2025 to signal which UN member states' recommendations it will implement.

On October 14, the International Criminal Court (ICC) [announced](#) it would step up [investigative efforts](#) in Congo, focusing in particular on crimes committed in North Kivu since January 2022. This action was prompted by a 2023 Congolese government [request](#).

In April, the implementation of ICC-ordered reparations in the case against Germain Katanga [was completed](#). Katanga was convicted by the ICC in 2014 for crimes committed in Ituri in 2003.