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Democratic Republic of Congo



People near Kibumba, north of Goma, flee fighting between Congolese forces and the M23 armed group in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, May 24, 2022.

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The human rights and security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo continued to deteriorate, particularly in eastern provinces. President Félix Tshisekedi's administration made little progress on promised systemic reforms to break the cycles of violence, abuse, corruption, and impunity that have plagued the country for decades.

In an atmosphere of growing intolerance for dissenting voices, repression against journalists, activists, government critics, and peaceful protesters continued.

In eastern Congo, the military rule imposed a year earlier in North Kivu and Ituri failed to curb widespread violence and atrocities by numerous armed groups against civilians. Armed groups and government forces killed more than 2,000 people between January and late October across both provinces.

Resurgent M23 rebels, backed by Rwanda, launched their biggest offensive against state forces in a decade, seizing portions of territory in North Kivu, which worsened the dire humanitarian situation in the region.

Nearly 5.6 million people were displaced [across the country](#) as of July, with more than 1.6 million in [Ituri](#) and more than 1.8 million in [North-Kivu](#) provinces alone, according to the United Nations.

An East African military force [started](#) deploying in eastern Congo in August amid regional tensions; the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, was repeatedly accused of failing to protect civilians, triggering [violence](#) and the looting of several MONUSCO bases.

Freedom of Expression, Peaceful Assembly, and Media

Freedoms of expression and association have drastically [deteriorated](#) in two eastern provinces under martial law. Initially imposed to address insecurity in the region, military authorities used it

to quash peaceful demonstrations with lethal force, arbitrarily detain and prosecute activists, journalists, and political opposition members.

In January, security forces killed [Mumbere Ushindi](#), a 22-year-old member of Lucha (*Lutte pour le changement* or Struggle for Change), a citizens' movement, during a protest against martial law in Beni. In August, 13 Lucha activists [were released](#) after nine months in [detention](#) in Beni for opposing martial law.

In April, police used excessive force to disperse a sit-in at the parliament in Kinshasa organized by political opposition supporters calling for a consensus around the electoral law, injuring at least 20 protesters.

In September, security forces used excessive force to break up a peaceful demonstration by a medical union in Kinshasa, injuring several people.

Attacks on Civilians by Armed Groups and Government Forces

Some 120 armed groups were active in eastern Congo's Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika provinces, including several groups with fighters from neighboring Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Many of their commanders have been implicated in war crimes, including massacres, sexual violence, recruiting children, pillaging, and [attacks on schools and hospitals](#).

Various armed actors, some unidentified, killed at least 2,446 civilians in South Kivu, North Kivu, and Ituri provinces, between January and late October, according to data collected by the [Kivu Security Tracker](#), which documents violence in eastern Congo. This includes at least 155 civilians killed by Congolese security forces.

Congolese and Ugandan joint military operations against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan-led armed group with [ties](#) to the extremist armed group Islamic State (also known as ISIS), did not stop deadly attacks by the ADF against civilians in North Kivu and Ituri.

In North Kivu, the M23 rebel group attacked the positions of government troops near Goma. Responsible for [widespread abuses](#) in 2012 and 2013, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, M23 rebels deliberately [killed](#) at least 29 civilians in areas under their control in June and July, and dozens more by the end of the year.

In a confidential report to the UN Security Council that [leaked](#) to the media in August, the UN Group of Experts on Congo found "solid evidence" of Rwandan forces providing direct support to M23 fighters. Rwanda [denied](#) these accusations.

Countries of the East African Community (EAC), which Congo joined in April, agreed to set up a regional force to fight armed groups in eastern Congo.

In late April and early December, Kenya [hosted talks](#) between the Congolese government and several armed groups aimed at securing the surrender and demobilization of fighters. The authorities failed to take several thousand surrendered fighters from various armed groups through its demobilization program, prompting many to return to armed groups.

Tensions remained high in South Kivu's highlands, with fighting involving several armed groups, some backed by neighboring countries. Burundian troops, which were conducting [secret incursions](#) since late 2021, entered South Kivu as the first deployment of the EAC force in August.

In July, violence [broke out](#) in Kwamouth in the western province of Mai-Ndombe between ethnic Teke and Yaka communities over land and customary rights. Dozens of people were reportedly

killed, and thousands displaced. A high-profile government delegation [visited](#) the area in August, and Congolese soldiers were deployed to reinforce security.

Justice and Accountability

A four-year trial [failed](#) to uncover the full truth about the 2017 murders of two UN investigators, Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, and the fate of their Congolese interpreter, Betu Tshintela; motorbike driver, Isaac Kabuayi; and two other unidentified motorbike drivers.

On January 29, a military court in Kananga [sentenced](#) to death 49 defendants, many in absentia, on various charges including terrorism, murder, and the war crime of mutilation. An army officer, Col. Jean de Dieu Mambweni, was [sentenced](#) to 10 years in prison for disobeying orders. A local immigration officer, Thomas Nkashama, was among those sentenced to death. The prosecution failed to examine who planned and ordered the killings, ignoring [information](#) pointing to the involvement of senior Congolese officials.

In March, the government [launched](#) national consultations on a new transitional justice initiative and reaffirmed its commitment to accountability for serious crimes committed across the country. But these consultations made little progress and Tshisekedi's administration has not taken concrete steps to end impunity.

On May 11, the High Military court upheld the guilty verdicts of two senior Congolese police officers involved in the 2010 assassination of prominent human rights defender Floribert Chebeya and his driver Fidèle Bazana. Former Col. Christian Ngoy Kenga Kenga was sentenced to death—commuted to life imprisonment—and former Lt. Jacques Mugabo was sentenced to 12 years in prison. The court acquitted former Maj. Paul Mwilambwe. Although the trial represents a positive step toward justice and accountability in Congo, several individuals believed to be implicated in the assassination have yet to be prosecuted. Suspect and former head of police, Gen. John Numbi, fled the country in 2021 and was still at large at time of writing.

Little progress was made in a trial to establish culpability for the December 2018 [massacres](#) in Yumbi territory in the country's northwest in which at least 535 people were killed. The trial started in 2021.

In June, former presidential Chief of Staff Vital Kamerhe was [acquitted](#) by an appeals court after being sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in 2020 for the embezzlement of nearly US\$50 million.

In August, former staunch Tshisekedi ally and head of his political party Jean-Marc Kabund [was arrested](#) on charges of contempt of head of state. Kabund was evicted from the presidential party in July and formed his own opposition party.

Also in August, Tshisekedi's former security advisor Francois Beya was [granted](#) conditional release on health grounds. He was arrested in early February, charged with plotting against the president, and put on trial in June.

[Gédéon Kyungu](#), a warlord responsible for atrocities in the southern region of Katanga who escaped from house arrest in Lubumbashi in March 2020, remained at large at time of writing.

Militia leader [Guidon Shimiray Mwissa](#), wanted by Congolese authorities for [serious crimes](#), including child recruitment and rape, remained active in North Kivu, commanding a faction of the Nduma Defense of Congo-Rénové. In May, Guidon joined a coalition of armed groups, some of them rivals, that [fought alongside](#) Congolese forces against the M23.

Environment and Human Rights

Congo's territory contains most of the world's second largest rainforest, which holds billions of tons of carbon underground and is home to Indigenous peoples.

In April, the Environment Ministry released an audit by the General Inspectorate of Finance, dated May 2021, that [revealed](#) at least six former ministers had granted illegal logging permits in violation of a nationwide moratorium. The audit also showed widespread tax avoidance by concession holders. The government suspended 12 concessions but fell short of cancelling all illegal permits.

In November, Tshisekedi [signed](#) a new law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples.

In July, the government launched an auction for licensing rights to 27 oil and 3 gas blocks, opening an estimated 11 million hectares of the rainforest to drilling. Drilling in these blocks could release up to [5.8 billion tons of carbon](#), more than 14 percent of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2021.

Key International Actors

In June, King Philippe of Belgium visited Congo for the first time and [reaffirmed](#) his “deepest regrets” for colonial-era abuses but did not offer an apology or raise the [issue of reparations](#). Belgian authorities [returned](#) a tooth of the murdered Congolese independence hero Patrice Lumumba to his family. The relic from the country’s first prime minister was taken around Congo ahead of a funeral in Kinshasa.

In August, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with President Tshisekedi in Kinshasa and pledged an additional \$10 million to promote peaceful political participation and transparent elections.

In December, the European Union added eight individuals to its targeted sanctions list (freezing of financial assets and travel bans), bringing to 17 the number of people, including senior officials, subjected to restrictive measures. The same month, the UN Security Council extended MONUSCO’s mandate for one year.