

Democratic Republic of Congo | Protect defenders for lasting peace in the country

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On 22 March 2021, the High Commissioner on human rights, the Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as the International Team of Experts on the Kasai region updated the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



[ISHR and SOS Information Juridique Multisectorielle's \(SOS IJM\) joint statement](#) delivered during the interactive dialogue emphasised that to achieve the rule of law and effectively fight impunity, the DRC needs to restore the independence of the judiciary and pass legislations effectively protecting the rights of human rights defenders, pro - democracy activists, whistleblowers and journalists.

“We urge the Congolese Parliament to pass a national law protecting human rights defenders, pro-democracy activists and whistleblowers in line with international standards” said Justin Bahirwe from SOS IJM. To conclude, the statement also invites OHCHR joint human rights office to support the process towards the adoption of such a law.

In her statement, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the situation in the east of the country – notably North and South Kivu, and Ituri provinces – which has continued to worsen since the presentation of her last report in October 2020. She also brought the attention of the Council and the DRC to the widespread hate-speech which could further fuel the conflict in these regions and call on the authorities to strengthen efforts to combat discrimination and hostility directed against people because of their ethnic, religious and gender identity. There must be an end to impunity for violations and abuses of human rights by members of all communities, in order to further peaceful coexistence.

Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mr. Bacre Ndiaye, Member of the International Team of Experts on the Kasai region both underlined that the establishment of a credible and holistic transitional justice process is essential to curb violence and build lasting peace and security. Finally, Bacre Ndiaye called on the Ministry of Justice and the Congolese Bar Association to strengthen the legal aid to which every accused is automatically entitled. The lack of a strong system of legal aid at present negatively impacts the ongoing trial of the assassination of the two Security Council Experts.

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