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Technical assistance and capacity-building

Human rights situation and the activities of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 57/34, provides an overview of the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 1 June 2024 and 31 May 2025. The overview is based on information gathered and cases of human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law documented by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the activities conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights through the Joint Office. In the report, the High Commissioner highlights key human rights developments and makes recommendations to the Government and the international partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

* The present document was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



I. Introduction

1. During the reporting period, the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo sharply deteriorated due to the escalation of armed conflict in the eastern provinces. Following the postponement of the tripartite summit between Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, initially scheduled for 15 December 2024, Alliance Fleuve Congo/Mouvement du 23 mars (AFC/M23) has expanded its hold on large parts of North Kivu and South Kivu, with the support of the Rwanda Defence Force. The deepening crisis led to massive displacement of civilians, further exacerbating the humanitarian situation.

2. Between 1 June 2024 and 31 May 2025, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office documented 5,091 human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, with 15,664 victims (10,498 men, 2,637 women, 1,260 people of unknown gender and age and 1,269 children). Of these, 61 per cent were committed by armed groups. Among armed groups, M23 and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) were responsible for the highest number of victims, while, among State agents, Congolese National Police agents and soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were responsible for the highest number of victims. The majority of documented violations and abuses throughout the Congolese territory were summary executions, incidents of torture and ill-treatment, incidents affecting property, violations of the right to liberty, namely, arbitrary arrests and detentions and abductions, and incidents of sexual violence.

3. The gradual disengagement of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) from South Kivu from 30 June 2024 posed serious challenges for in-person human rights monitoring and investigations. The Joint Office continued to implement its human rights mandate through its residual presence in South Kivu. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) offices in Haut-Katanga, Kasai Central, Tanganyika and Tshopo Provinces were operational, in addition to the Joint Office's presences in Beni, Bunia, Goma and Kinshasa. The control by M23 over Goma and Bukavu led to the temporary relocation of non-critical staff of the Joint Office. However, human rights monitoring and reporting continued, mostly remotely, while support for individual protection was provided to human rights defenders and civil society.

4. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was elected to the Human Rights Council for the period 2025–2027. This represents an opportunity for the country to showcase its commitment to human rights domestically, with concrete steps, and at the international level. Nevertheless, challenges remain in terms of the implementation of its human rights obligations.

II. Methodology

5. The information contained in the present report does not reflect all the alleged human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law that took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the reporting period. It reflects only those that the Joint Office was able to verify through corroboration by at least three independent sources, in accordance with OHCHR methodology and the “reasonable ground to believe” standard of proof. With the progressive withdrawal of MONUSCO, the Joint Office has experienced logistical and security constraints in accessing certain areas, notably in the Provinces of Ituri, Maniema, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika. Access was further complicated by limitations imposed on the movements of MONUSCO personnel in M23-controlled areas. The Joint Office carried out remote monitoring, as necessary, while always prioritizing the protection of sources and putting the principles of “do no harm”, confidentiality and informed consent at the centre of its mandate.

6. Due to the establishment pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-37/1 of the fact-finding mission on the situation in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is due to present a comprehensive report to the Council at its sixtieth session, the present report is focused on human rights developments in

provinces not covered by the mandate of the fact-finding mission and will therefore exclude specific analysis of the M23-related crisis in North Kivu and South Kivu.

III. Main human rights developments

7. In accordance with OHCHR methodology, the Joint Office documented 5,091 human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law between 1 June 2024 and 31 May 2025. That is almost the same figure as was documented during the previous reporting period (5,047). The number of victims nationwide, however, increased by 16 per cent, to 15,664, compared with 13,532 in the previous reporting period. Of all the violations and abuses, 82 per cent (4,197) occurred in the conflict-affected provinces.¹ Members of armed groups were allegedly responsible for 72 per cent of those violations and abuses. North Kivu and Ituri were the provinces most affected, with 64 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, of all documented violations and abuses.

8. The Joint Office also recorded cases of prison breaks that led to human rights violations in Kinshasa and in eastern provinces. For instance, following the M23 advance, 8,065 detainees escaped from prisons in Goma in North Kivu, Bukavu, Kalehe and Uvira in South Kivu, and Kalemie in Tanganyika. These included 199 men accused or convicted of international crimes, jeopardizing decades-long efforts in the fight against impunity.

A. Human rights situation in provinces not affected by armed conflict

1. Western provinces and effect of the Teke-Yaka conflict

9. During the period under review, the Joint Office documented 81 human rights violations and abuses in the Provinces of Équateur, Kongo Central, Kwango, Kwilu, Mai-Ndombe, Mongala and Tshuapa, with 334 victims (233 men, 36 women and 65 children). The main violations and abuses documented in these provinces were summary executions (88 victims), deaths in detention (75 victims), sexual violence (49 victims) and ill-treatment (34 victims). State actors, in particular soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, personnel of penitentiary services and Congolese National Police officers, committed 56 per cent of the violations documented, with 216 victims (145 men, 56 children and 15 women).

10. Mai-Ndombe was the most affected province, due to the ongoing conflict between the Teke and Yaka communities and related clashes between Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers and members of Mobondo groups. Most violations and abuses occurred during attacks by members of Mobondo groups against villages and Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo operations. At least 50 people (32 men, 9 women and 9 children) were killed in this province alone, 39 of them by members of Mobondo groups and 11 by Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers.

11. Deaths in detention also rose to worrisome levels in these provinces. For example, in Kwilu Province, the Joint Office documented the deaths of at least 67 individuals (66 men and 1 boy) in Kikwit and Bandundu prisons. Most of the victims were members of Mobondo groups who died due to the poor detention conditions, insufficient food and lack of access to healthcare.

12. Between May and September 2024, at least 49 girls aged between 11 and 16 years who had been displaced due to the conflict were raped by members of Mobondo groups or Congolese security forces in the city of Kenge, Kwango Province. Several of these cases have been settled out of court between families, in violation of the applicable law.

13. The Joint Office also documented a high number of incidents affecting property in all these provinces, including looting of crops both by Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers and by members of Mobondo groups. In addition to targeted attacks against villages and farms, members of Mobondo groups abducted at least 22 inhabitants.

¹ North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, Maniema and Tanganyika.

14. The right to education was heavily affected in these provinces, with the destruction of schools by members of Mobondo groups or their use by Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers. Since the beginning of the intercommunal conflict, according to the Joint Office's sources, at least 284 schools have been either burned down or otherwise destroyed by members of Mobondo groups, affecting 39,325 pupils of elementary and secondary schools. From January 2024 to May 2025, at least 70 schools were destroyed, affecting 9,417 pupils of elementary and secondary schools.

2. Kinshasa Province

15. The Joint Office documented 212 human rights violations and abuses in Kinshasa, 95 per cent of them by State agents and 5 per cent by members of Mobondo groups on the outskirts of the capital. Among State actors, Congolese National Police officers committed the highest number of violations, in particular arbitrary arrests and detentions, with 1,093 victims (890 men, 28 women, 162 children and 13 people of unknown gender and age).

16. Generally, detention conditions, as observed by the Joint Office, continued to be incompatible with relevant international human rights standards. In many police stations, people were detained beyond the maximum period of 48 hours under national law, often without separation by age and gender, potentially leading to sexual violence and violations of children's rights. The observed lack of essential hygiene and sanitation in police stations was conducive to the spread of contagious diseases among detainees and police officers. Penitentiary services faced similar challenges, in particular regarding overcrowding, poor detention conditions and lack of access to food and healthcare, leading to deaths in detention. Emblematic in this regard is Makala prison, which suffers from a severe overcrowding. On 2 September 2024, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police brutally repressed an escape attempt from Makala prison, in which at least 406 detainees were killed and 200 injured by security forces. The victims were reportedly killed by bullets fired by the military and police officers on duty and by suffocation. In addition, 269 women were raped by other detainees inside the prison. Three women died shortly after the rapes. Following the escape attempt at Makala prison, the Minister of the Interior, Security, Decentralization and Customary Affairs and the Minister of Justice announced emergency measures, including the suspension of visits and the transfer of detainees to other prisons. They also launched an administrative investigation and, on 4 September 2024, a trial was opened at the prison against 64 detainees, as well as two soldiers and two police officers, for rape, terrorism, malicious destruction of property and arson. The prison director was suspended, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. At the end of the reporting period, 8,539 people, including 195 women and 12 children, were detained at Makala prison, more than five times its capacity of 1,500.

3. Bas-Uélé, Haut-Uélé and Tshopo

17. The Joint Office documented 215 human rights violations and abuses in Tshopo Province, with 410 victims (213 men, 97 women, 51 persons of unknown gender and age and 49 children). Most of these violations and abuses occurred in the context of the conflict between the Mbole and Lengola communities. According to government sources, since the beginning of the conflict, at least 107,000 people have been displaced due to this conflict, and many have lived under precarious conditions in sites for internally displaced persons in Kisangani and Lubunga. About 30 per cent of them have returned to their places of origin, according to provincial authorities, as of May 2025. Self-defence groups committed killings, and acts of ill-treatment, some of which resulted in disabilities.

18. In the context of the intercommunal conflict, the Joint Office documented 171 victims of killings, 55 victims of ill-treatment, 16 victims of abductions, 3 victims of sexual violence (one who was beheaded and two who were subjected to forced marriage and sexual slavery) and widespread looting and destruction of property by non-State armed actors. Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers committed human rights violations against 81 victims, namely, extrajudicial killings of 14 men, as well as ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and extortion. State actors killed 10 victims in the context of the intercommunal conflict.

19. The Joint Office documented most of the cases of human rights violations and abuses during an investigation mission in August 2024, followed by high-level advocacy with the Government and humanitarian partners. From 17 to 19 December 2024, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo organized a forum on peace, security and development in Tshopo, which contributed to de-escalation of the conflict. Forty-four people were arrested, with 13 acquitted and 31 convicted by military justice authorities, through proceedings that lacked judicial guarantees, mainly under charges of terrorism, participation in an insurrectional movement and illegal possession of weapons of war.

20. In Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé, the Joint Office documented 31 human rights violations, with 75 victims, all committed by State actors, in particular during joint operations by Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers and Congolese National Police agents (64 per cent). The most documented violations included arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment, and incidents affecting individuals' property through destruction, extortion and looting. Three violations were committed by members of an armed ex-Séléka faction from the Central African Republic. For instance, on 13 October 2024, in Banda, Ango territory, Bas-Uélé Province, two men and a boy were killed and 19 people were abducted by members of an armed ex-Séléka faction.

4. Haut-Katanga Province

21. The Joint Office documented 256 human rights violations and abuses in Haut-Katanga, with 337 victims (274 men, 23 women and 40 children). Congolese National Police agents and Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers committed human rights violations against the highest number of victims, and the violations most documented were arbitrary arrests and detentions, mainly for violations of due process and fair trial (75 per cent), and summary executions (12 per cent). Cases of repression of freedom of expression and peaceful protest were also documented. Most of the human rights violations and abuses committed in Haut-Katanga were committed by security forces assigned to securing mining sites, non-State armed actors and companies.

22. These human rights violations and abuses have had an impact on the rights to education, health and an adequate standard of living. On 2 October 2024, the Joint Office carried out a field mission in the village of Kilongo to verify allegations regarding pollution caused by the Kinsevere copper mining company. During the mission, the Joint Office observed that wastewater from the plant, contaminated by toxic substances, had been channelled into the river, as a consequence of which skin rashes had been observed on several adults and children in the village. The Joint Office supported civil society in preparing an advocacy brief, which was submitted to the president of the provincial assembly. The latter subsequently convened the mining company's officials and reminded them of their responsibility to respect human rights. The Joint Office also facilitated a dialogue between the affected communities and the mining company and discussed with the company's officials appropriate measures to remedy the situation, offering its support for the implementation of a due diligence policy.

5. Kasai region

23. The Joint Office documented 83 human rights violations by State actors, in particular by the Congolese National Police (70 per cent), the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (13 per cent), and penitentiary and administrative authorities (6 per cent). These violations affected 136 victims (109 men, 17 women and 10 children). The most documented violations were arbitrary arrests and detentions (48 per cent), violations of the right to physical integrity through wounding and ill-treatment (23 per cent) and summary executions (11 per cent). An emblematic case occurred on 15 August 2024 in Kanfuma mine in Kamonia territory, Kasai Province, where two men were killed by a Congolese National Police officer assigned to secure a diamond mine. The two men were killed during a fight with police officers following their refusal to pay illegal "taxes" imposed by police officers to access the mine. As a result of the Joint Office's advocacy with provincial authorities, the police officer was arrested and the governor decided to close the site.

B. Situation in provinces affected by armed conflict

1. Ituri Province and Beni and Lubero territories

24. In the reporting period, ADF was the second largest armed group perpetrator after M23 in conflict-affected provinces. ADF was responsible for human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law against 2,268 victims (1,312 men, 428 persons of unknown gender and age, 405 women, and 123 children), including 1,146 civilian victims of killings (686 men, 197 women, 23 children and 240 individuals of unknown gender and age). Of these human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, at least 71 per cent occurred in North Kivu and 29 per cent in Ituri. ADF operated in small, scattered and mobile groups that targeted civilians in retaliation for military operations and looted food and medicines from civilian houses, markets and medical facilities. In June and July 2024, the Joint Office noted an increase in the violence of ADF attacks during which ADF members often wore Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo uniforms. Between 4 and 21 June 2024, for example, ADF killed at least 182 civilians in Beni and Lubero territories. On 7 June 2024, in Masala, Mahili and Keme villages, Beni territory, members of ADF summarily executed at least 43 people, wounded some with knives, and abducted several others. During these attacks, they also set fire to vehicles, houses and shops. Health centres were also looted and destroyed.

25. In addition to being affected by the conflict involving ADF, Ituri continues to be the epicentre of the conflict opposing Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) and Zaire armed groups claiming to represent the Lendu and Hema communities. CODECO committed 372 human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law against 1,509 victims, including 340 victims of summary executions (200 men, 86 women, 47 children and 7 individuals of unknown gender and age) and 107 victims of sexual violence (67 women and 40 girls). Zaire armed groups committed 51 abuses and violations against 80 victims. Abuses and violations mainly consisted of summary killings (39 victims) and ill-treatment (16 victims). These armed groups loot, impose illegal payments and harass civilians in gold mines, farms and along Lake Albert where they are fishing.

26. In February 2025, Thomas Lubanga Dyilo launched the Convention pour la révolution populaire armed group, mainly consisting of former Zaire factions. This was coupled with Uganda People's Defence Force reinforcements in Ituri and Bunia. The Ugandan armed forces have been deployed since November 2021 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a joint operation with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against ADF in Beni territory, North Kivu, and Mambasa and Irumu territories, Ituri. This affected the conflict dynamics and could lead to a further increase in ethnic tensions and conflict over natural resources. The Joint Office conducted two missions in Djugu territory between January and February 2025 to investigate the violence between CODECO and Zaire and confirmed that at least 139 people had been killed, mainly by CODECO between December 2024 and February 2025. At the end of the reporting period, the deterioration of the security and human rights situation continued to cause forced displacement, with over 46 sites for internally displaced persons in Ituri Province, posing serious humanitarian challenges.

2. Tanganyika Province

27. During the period under review, the Joint Office documented 31 human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in Tanganyika, with 61 victims (44 men, 7 women and 10 children). The majority were committed by Mai-Mai groups (nine abuses), the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (seven violations) and penitentiary services (six violations). The main violations and abuses documented were extrajudicial killings by Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers, arbitrary arrests and detentions by State agents and deaths in detention. The escape of at least 399 detainees in Kalemie on 19 February 2025 threatened the security of victims, witnesses and judicial personnel.

28. The M23 offensive in January and February 2025 led to a rise in criminality in Tanganyika because of the increase in the number of displaced persons and armed groups fleeing from South Kivu Province to Tanganyika. At least 27 armed robberies were recorded

since the beginning of 2025. Due to increased challenges in the administration of justice, the Joint Office noted a recrudescence of mob justice, with at least five cases documented during the reporting period. Several Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo security posts have been dismantled following their redeployment to the front against M23, allowing armed groups and other unidentified armed actors to illegally erect roadblocks to extort money, further hampering the supply of essential goods to remote areas. Over 20,000 people fled South Kivu to Kalemie.

3. Maniema Province

29. The Joint Office documented 48 human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, with 79 victims, in Maniema Province, of which 68 per cent were committed by armed groups, namely, Mai-Mai factions, and 32 per cent by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police. The presence of armed groups, proliferation of weapons, and inadequate deployment of security forces contributed to these violations and abuses. The most documented violations and abuses included abductions by armed groups, incidents of sexual violence and incidents affecting property, mainly by Mai-Mai and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With the M23 offensive, the territories of Kabambare, Kasongo and Punia received displaced people from North Kivu and South Kivu, worsening the dire humanitarian situation due to members of Wazalendo groups and the almost non-existent humanitarian assistance. The proximity of Maniema to North Kivu and South Kivu also jeopardized the work of human rights defenders, who received threats due to their work. The judicial system in Maniema became almost inoperative, due to a shortage of magistrates.

C. Hate speech and ethnically motivated attacks

30. The resurgence of M23 and its advance in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces led to an increase in hate speech, incitement to hatred, and ethnically motivated attacks based on the real or perceived ethnic origin, physical characteristics, or language (for instance, Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda) of the victim. The Joint Office documented at least 13 allegations of hate speech, of which six cases met the Rabat threshold.²

31. In Kasai region and Kinshasa, 18 victims of ethnically motivated attacks in relation to M23 expansion were documented by the Joint Office from January 2025. For instance, on 15 February 2025, in Mbulungu, Kazumba territory, Kasai Central Province, a man was arrested, detained and ill-treated by Congolese National Police officers. The victim was intercepted at a checkpoint and suspected of being Rwandan because of his facial features and the fact that he was not fluent in the local language, Tshiluba.

32. To address hate speech, since May 2025, the Joint Office, other MONUSCO components and United Nations agencies are implementing the “Mieux vivre ensemble” campaign, which targets youth, the media, opinion leaders and other stakeholders, with the potential for a positive impact in reducing the propagation of hate speech affecting all communities. The Joint Office also organized and participated in awareness-raising workshops on the fight against hate speech and continued engagements for the adoption of the draft law against tribalism, racism and xenophobia, a new version of which was submitted to the National Assembly in December 2024 and has not yet been tabled.

D. Civic space

33. The Joint Office documented 121 violations and abuses related to civic space, with 347 victims throughout the Congolese territory. The main perpetrators were identified as the Congolese National Police, Mai-Mai factions and M23. At least 91 people (77 men, 2 women,

² The Rabat threshold test, developed by OHCHR, is a six-part framework used to determine when expression crosses a threshold such that it constitutes incitement to hatred and could justify restrictions on freedom of expression. See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/one-pager-incitement-hatred-rabat-threshold-test>.

4 boys and 8 individuals of unknown gender and age) were detained throughout the country for exercising their freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

34. Threats against and intimidation of opposition politicians, civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders continued. In the reporting period, intelligence services arrested several political opponents and accused them of inciting civil disobedience, while others were suspected of “supporting separatist ideas” or AFC/M23. On 19 April 2025, the Minister of the Interior, Security, Decentralization and Customary Affairs suspended all activities of Joseph Kabila Kabange’s party over its alleged links to M23 and Rwanda. The Minister of Justice ordered the seizure of Mr. Kabila’s assets and reported that he had ordered the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo military prosecutor to open judicial proceedings against him and other members of his coalition. While no formal charge has been brought against him yet, Mr. Kabila’s properties were searched by intelligence services. On 22 May 2025, the Senate lifted his immunities. On 23 May 2025, Kabila addressed the nation, calling for a “citizen pact” to restore peace and fight “dictatorship”, and visited the cities of Goma and Bukavu, which were under M23 control. Meanwhile, former presidential candidate Moise Katumbi denounced illegal searches of his property carried out on 25 April 2025 and, like other opposition figures, the allegedly intentional non-renewal of his passport.

35. In July 2024, a member of an opposition party was gang-raped and his wife subjected to forced nudity by National Intelligence Agency agents, while they were in detention. According to his family, Daniel Ngoy Mulunda-Nyanga, a pastor and the former President of the National Electoral Commission, was arrested on 18 December 2024 in Zambia and then transferred to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite his refugee status, and has been held incommunicado since December 2024. Authorities have not disclosed the reasons for his arrest, and his family does not have access to him.

36. Those detained at the National Intelligence Agency have been reported as not having access to their families or medication, with allegations of torture and sexual violence. The Joint Office has been denied access to military intelligence services and National Intelligence Agency facilities, despite efforts.

37. The extension of the state of emergency (*état de siège*) in North Kivu and Ituri continued to be criticized by civil society actors through peaceful demonstrations, which are usually broken up, and activists subjected to harassment and intimidation. Moreover, Congolese authorities imposed undue restrictions on freedom of expression and opinion by imposing pro-government narratives on media outlets. On 20 April, the Higher Audiovisual and Communications Council issued a communiqué threatening journalists with sanctions if they broadcast programmes deemed “unpatriotic”. On 25 November 2024, the Minister of Human Rights signed a circular to regulate the activities of human rights defenders, further limiting their freedom.

38. The situation of human rights defenders has also significantly deteriorated since the resurgence of M23. M23 displayed open hostility towards human rights defenders, journalists and civil society actors, banning their activities. Many were specifically targeted and forced to flee. The Joint Office provided various forms of direct support and protection to at least 173 human rights defenders, including 24 women. Hundreds relied on assistance from protection actors for their protection and survival. From January 2025 to date, the Joint Office recorded 568 requests for protection from human rights defenders, of whom 87 were women.

E. Sexual and gender-based violence

39. The Joint Office documented cases of sexual violence affecting 1,107 victims throughout the Congolese territory, including conflict-related sexual violence against 739 victims (481 women, 251 girls, 2 boys, 4 men and 1 person of unknown gender and age). Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers committed sexual violence against the highest number of victims (30 per cent), followed by M23 (18 per cent), CODECO (15 per cent), and Mai-Mai groups and Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (6 per cent each). Women and girls, in particular those who are internally displaced, have been raped, and, in many cases, gang-raped, while going to or returning from their

farms, or while looking for food or firewood, in particular by members of M23, ADF and CODECO in North Kivu and Ituri. Victims have also been abducted and subsequently raped or subjected to sexual slavery or forced marriage by armed groups. Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers committed sexual violence against young girls, including cases of child, early and forced marriage, in and around their military bases. The dire humanitarian situation in the eastern provinces significantly hindered the access to food, education and protection of internally displaced women and girls, putting them at a higher risk of being victims of sexual exploitation and forced and child marriage. Civil society organizations continued to report on the alarming prevalence of survival sex and brothels in and around sites for internally displaced persons and military bases.

40. The Joint Office supported national authorities in achieving some progress in the fight against conflict-related sexual violence. For instance, the military justice authorities prosecuted and convicted 22 perpetrators of sexual violence: 13 Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers, 1 Congolese National Police agent and 8 armed group members. In Tanganyika, the Joint Office implemented a project on promoting human security for the empowerment of the most vulnerable communities affected by gender-based violence.

F. Economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development

41. Insecurity caused by clashes between armed groups and armed forces for control of territory and natural resources impeded the enjoyment and realization of economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development. Out of all violations and abuses documented, at least 27 per cent involved actual or attempted extortion or looting, revealing systemic and structural obstacles that had a negative impact on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. The right to development requires that all peoples participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development. Due to the conflict in the eastern provinces of the country, hundreds of thousands of people have been forcibly displaced, the provision of basic social services has been disrupted, and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in areas affected by the security crisis has been hampered.

42. Several hundred schools were closed in territories under the control of armed groups, affecting the right to education of thousands of children who were at higher risk of exploitation and forced recruitment. The Joint Office also documented incidents affecting medical facilities and health workers in conflict-affected provinces, including the looting of stocks of medicines and the destruction of medical equipment, and threats against and kidnappings and extortion of health workers. This situation has led to limited access to primary healthcare services for the population, with a reduction in support from humanitarian organizations.

43. Extortion and looting by all parties continued. Security forces and members of armed groups imposed illegal “taxes” on the exploitation of natural resources, mining and agricultural activities. This situation had an impact on food security, with the loss of means of subsistence in a worrying humanitarian context. Regarding the right to food, the volatile security situation and the activities of armed groups have had a negative impact on the delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance to people in the provinces affected by conflict. Insecurity and attacks against humanitarian workers led to denial or restriction of humanitarian assistance. AFC/M23 forcibly closed sites for internally displaced persons around Goma, and imposed restrictions on movement, depriving internally displaced persons of access to humanitarian assistance.

IV. Technical cooperation

A. Transitional justice and the fight against impunity

44. The Joint Office continued to provide direct technical and logistical support to the Congolese justice system, with a focus on strengthening accountability for serious crimes.

That included support with judicial investigations, the deployment of mobile courts and contributions to the development and implementation of prosecutorial strategies at the national level, particularly in the provinces most affected by conflict, as well as in Kasai region. As part of this engagement, in 2024, 39 additional priority cases were selected, bringing the total number of priority cases to 146.

45. The support of the Joint Office with investigations and court proceedings contributed to bringing to justice perpetrators of serious crimes, including crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of human rights, such as conflict-related sexual violence and violations of children's rights. In coordination with MONUSCO, the Office organized a joint investigative team mission in Ituri Province and facilitated the provision of judicial protection for 314 victims and witnesses (232 men, 76 women and 6 children). The Joint Office also supported seven criminal trials. These proceedings led to the conviction of 188 Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers, 19 Congolese National Police officers, 41 armed group members and 163 civilians involved in human rights violations and abuses. In emblematic court cases, the Joint Office supported judicial authorities in setting up protection measures for 35 victims and witnesses. On 4 November 2024, Nkengwa Omari Donat, a self-proclaimed general and the founder of a Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki group, was convicted of human rights-related crimes. Of the 866 identified victims, 363 were admitted as civil parties before the military tribunal, including 88 who were able to testify in person under judicial protection measures supported by the Joint Office.

46. The Joint Office actively contributed to the development of the new United Nations Joint Justice Reform Support Programme for 2025–2029. In this regard, on 26 and 27 November 2024, the Joint Office organized, together with other United Nations system entities, a workshop bringing together representatives of relevant institutions involved in the fight against impunity for international crimes. The Joint Office also contributed to the organization of the national conference on justice (*états généraux de la justice*), in which participants took stock of the progress made in support of justice reform. The recommendations from this 10-day assembly, which took place from 6 to 16 November 2024, are reflected in the draft national justice reform policy for the period 2025–2034.

47. The Joint Office contributed to the finalization of the draft law on fundamental principles relating to transitional justice and the draft law amending and supplementing the Organic Act of 11 April 2013 on the organization, functioning and jurisdiction of the ordinary court system, which were adopted during the forty-fourth session of the Council of Ministers, on 23 May 2025. One of the measures proposed is the constitution of mixed chambers and special investigation units composed of civil and military judges and prosecutors.

48. From 24 to 28 June 2024, the Joint Office facilitated a high-level mission of the National Reparations Fund for Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Other Crimes against the Peace and Security of Humanity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Côte d'Ivoire as part of experience-sharing and capacity-building for transitional justice mechanisms. The Joint Office also facilitated coordination between transitional justice initiatives and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme at the national and provincial levels. In September 2024, the Joint Office participated in the strategic review of the Programme, providing recommendations to integrate transitional justice components into its programming and to strengthen consultation with local actors and other national mechanisms. The Joint Office supported the Ministry of Human Rights in updating the National Transitional Justice Policy. Since the signing of the technical cooperation agreement in July 2023, the Joint Office has supported the rehabilitation of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kasai Central and trained the commissioners.

49. The Joint Office continued to support judicial authorities in the fight against impunity, notably by providing forensic expertise, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 54/34. On 23 July 2024, a milestone was achieved with the official handover of essential forensic equipment to the Bukavu forensic medicine centre in South Kivu. This contribution has enhanced the centre's capacity to preserve human remains and conduct autopsies in accordance with international standards. The forensic team also supported Congolese authorities in the dignified management of human remains following the takeover

by M23 of the cities of Goma and Bukavu in January 2025 and February 2025, respectively. In this context, the Bukavu forensic medicine centre received the remains of 14 persons, including four children, one woman and five men. From 18 to 22 November 2024, in Bunia, Ituri Province, the forensic team carried out operational interventions in an area of Licha, to locate, recover and conduct forensic examination of bodies, in support of judicial investigations. It also provided legal assistance and psychosocial support to 111 victims and witnesses, including 57 women. From 19 to 30 August 2024, the forensic team carried out anthropological examinations of 39 bodies stored in Kananga forensic medicine laboratory and continued to build local capacity through the training of 20 medical students, including 10 women, and 1 medical professional.

50. The forensic team continued to support Congolese authorities in the institutionalization of forensic medicine and pathology as academic disciplines within Congolese universities. With the support of the Joint Office, six Congolese students have been admitted to institutions abroad to study forensic medicine, contributing to the development of national expertise. On 14 May 2025, the Joint Office presented the Government with a curriculum for postdoctoral studies on forensic medicine and a proposal for a medical residency programme on forensic medicine, following two years of intense joint work locally and internationally under the leadership of the Minister of Higher Education. This will enable national universities to offer specialized courses on forensic science and increase cooperation between OHCHR and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in strengthening accountability mechanisms, advancing the fight against impunity, and upholding the rights of victims and families of disappeared persons.

B. Women's rights and gender equality

51. The Joint Office continued to support Congolese authorities in the field of women's rights and gender equality. From 6 June to 30 September 2024, the Joint Office implemented a project aimed at installing solar panels in and around the Bushagara and Kanyaruchinya internally displaced persons sites in the territory of Nyiragongo, North Kivu Province, and also aimed at improving the security of 1,000 girls and 500 women and enabling them to pursue their economic activities, including at night.

52. In December 2024, the Joint Office trained 36 representatives of judicial authorities, lawyers and civil society actors, including eight women, on fighting trafficking in persons, with a focus on sexual exploitation against women and children. Following the 2013 Joint Communiqué between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations on the Fight Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Joint Office continued to support the efforts of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police to prevent sexual violence. In 2024, the Joint Office conducted training on the prevention of sexual violence for 3,123 members of personnel (1,229 soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 1,894 officers of the Congolese National Police) and 79 wildlife conservation rangers in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. A total of 615 Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 252 Congolese National Police unit commanders signed deeds of commitment to combat sexual violence.

C. Inclusion and non-discrimination

53. The Joint Office continued to organize capacity-building activities for government representatives to ensure that national development plans, budgets and monitoring processes were inclusive and took into account persons with disabilities. The Joint Office organized three workshops in Kinshasa and Kongo Central on good practices, networking and advocacy for persons with disabilities and civil society organizations. As part of these joint efforts, the ministry for persons with disabilities made available a sign language dictionary, marking a crucial step in the country's commitment to linguistic inclusion.

D. Business and human rights

54. The Joint Office continued to promote the human rights economy and the protection of human rights in the context of extractive industries. In August 2024, the Joint Office organized, in collaboration with the provincial authorities of Haut-Katanga and Lualaba and the National Human Rights Commission, three capacity-building sessions for State actors, civil society organizations and companies, to raise awareness of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. The objective of these workshops was to strengthen the capacities of these actors in monitoring human rights abuses by extractive companies in order to reduce the impact of their activities on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.

E. Cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms

55. On 5 November 2024, the Human Rights Council held the review of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as part of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review. The Joint Office provided technical support to the Government and coordinated the compilation of the United Nations country team's contribution. The Joint Office also supported the country visits of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in December 2024 and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons in May 2025.

56. On 9 and 11 April 2025, the Joint Office organized a national workshop for United Nations entities and civil society on the right to development and practical tools for its operationalization as part of a pilot project implemented by OHCHR to support State and non-State actors to concretely and effectively pursue this right.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

57. **The human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained highly concerning during the period under review. The M23 offensive has had a negative impact on security in other provinces affected by the conflict due to the redeployment of security forces to fight M23, which has created a security vacuum exploited by other armed groups, such as ADF and CODECO. Human rights violations and abuses were documented in the context of intercommunal violence in Mai-Ndombe and Tshopo Provinces, causing forced displacement. Prison breaks in Kinshasa, and in North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika, contributed to an increase in urban criminality, and mob justice significantly affected the administration of justice and protection of victims and witnesses.**

58. **The restriction of civic space continued, with arbitrary arrests and detentions of political opponents and continued threats against and intimidation of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists, by both State and non-State actors, in particular M23. Hate speech and ethnically motivated attacks increased in Kinshasa and the Kasai region against people presumed to be associated with M23 based on their physical appearance or language. With the support of United Nations agencies, preventive outreach and awareness-raising campaigns have been launched to prevent hate speech and foster national cohesion.**

59. **Despite the progress made by the Government in the fight against conflict-related and sexual and gender-based violence, rape and sexual exploitation of women and girls remained rampant, mostly affecting women and girls in conflict-affected provinces.**

60. **The Joint Office continued to support the Government in implementing its human rights obligations, including by supporting its efforts to combat impunity and its transitional justice initiatives.**

61. **Against that background, the High Commissioner recommends that the Democratic Republic of the Congo:**

(a) Continue implementing, at the national and provincial levels, through laws, policies and the provision of financial resources, the five pledges made by the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, in the context of the high-level event marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

(b) Protect civic space and the rights and freedoms of all persons, including all political actors, regardless of their affiliation, journalists, human rights defenders and other civil society actors, and ensure that the use of force by State agents, including during law enforcement operations, is in strict conformity with international human rights law;

(c) Expedite the adoption of the bill on tribalism, racism and xenophobia as a key legislative measure to prevent and counter hate speech and incitement to hostility, violence and discrimination, while ensuring that it does not infringe the right to freedom of expression, and take effective measures to reduce intercommunal violence;

(d) Ensure the effective and meaningful participation of women, youth, internally displaced persons and refugees in domestic, regional and international peace processes and ensure that the protection of their rights constitutes an integral part of peace agreements;

(e) Revitalize the human rights committees bringing together representatives of the Congolese security forces and the Joint Office to ensure proper monitoring of human rights violations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police and corrective actions;

(f) Improve detention conditions in prisons and police stations, including by ensuring separation between children and adults, and women and men, and limit the use of pretrial detention, in compliance with international human rights law and standards;

(g) Continue efforts aimed at complying with its obligations in the area of economic, social and cultural rights, notably the rights to education, health and an adequate standard of living, especially in conflict-affected provinces and in the context of extractive industries;

(h) In the context of the armed conflict, ensure the deployment of adequate, effective and responsible security forces, who are properly vetted and operate in strict compliance with international human rights and international humanitarian law, to guarantee the protection of civilians across the Congolese territory, paying particular attention to the areas from which MONUSCO has withdrawn and where the security vacuum due to redeployment of troops is negatively affecting the protection of civilians;

(i) Ensure that all military operations against armed groups by the Congolese armed forces, whether operating alone or jointly with bilaterally deployed troops, are conducted in strict compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law;

(j) Establish a national mechanism for the prevention of torture;

(k) Implement all measures necessary to prevent and redress conflict-related sexual violence, bring perpetrators to justice, and facilitate victim-centred assistance in accordance with Act No. 22/065 establishing the fundamental principles for the protection and reparation of victims of conflict-related sexual violence and victims of crimes against the peace and security of humanity;

(l) Continue efforts towards establishing a holistic transitional justice policy that is victim-centred, inclusive and participatory and that is aimed at identifying and addressing the root causes of violence and conflict;

(m) Strengthen its collaboration with United Nations human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies and special procedures, by submitting reports and granting a standing invitation to mandate holders;

(n) Provide adequate resources to universities and academic institutions to support the use of the curriculum on forensic science.

62. The international partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should:

(a) Ensure that human rights protection, accountability and transitional justice, including for internally displaced persons and refugees, are integral parts of all peace talks and agreements;

(b) Increase support to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through technical and financial resources to help national, provincial and local authorities to address human rights and humanitarian challenges;

(c) Increase financial and political support for sustained human rights work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

(d) Promote academic exchange programmes and provide financial and technical support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the field of forensic science;

(e) Promote the realization of the right to development and advocate for the observance of human rights by all international actors engaged in extractive activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and other relevant international standards.
