

# Joint Letter

February 4, 2025

To: All members and observers of the United Nations Human Rights Council

**Re: Urgent Need for the UN Human Rights Council to Create an Independent Mandate to Investigate Rights Violations and Abuses by All Parties in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**

Excellencies,

We, the undersigned 75 Congolese, regional, and international human rights organizations, write to appeal to you to urgently work to establish, in the context of a special session of the UN Human Rights Council, an independent mandate to investigate and report on grave rights violations and abuses being committed by all parties to the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and to support efforts to hold perpetrators to account.

The conflict between Rwandan forces and the M23 armed group, on one side, and the Congolese army and the armed groups it has allied itself with on the other has escalated since the M23's offensive on Goma, the capital of North Kivu province in January 2025. The resurgence of the M23, [with the support of Rwanda and Uganda](#), in late 2021 and the ensuing conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has had a devastating impact on the lives of civilians, who for decades have faced degradation and abuse. During the recent fighting, in which the M23 took control of Goma, human rights groups and the media have reported killings, rapes, looting, forced labor, and forced recruitment.

Rwandan forces and the M23 and the Congolese military and its allies long committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate shelling, attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, killings, torture, rape, and looting. Both the Congolese authorities and the M23, which announced on January 30 the creation of a civilian-led authority to govern occupied territories, have a track record of human rights violations and abuses, including [restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression](#) and association, arbitrary arrest and detention, and the repression of human rights defenders. Accountability for serious crimes in eastern Congo has long been inadequate to address the widespread abuses committed by all sides. This impunity for past abuses has been a key driver of grave violations during the current conflict. It is more important than ever for concerned governments to signal their commitment to accountability.

The current humanitarian situation in Goma is especially dire. The city's residents, along with hundreds of thousands of displaced people, have inadequate access to food, water, and electricity. The M23 and Rwandan forces have obligations to civilians under international humanitarian law, including protecting and facilitating access to humanitarian assistance, and permitting freedom of movement.

The current crisis demands the utmost attention and complementary action by all parts of the international and regional human rights systems. In a [January 31 statement](#), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that "it is crucial that there are investigations

into the commission of violations, with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice and ensuring comprehensive accountability.” The Human Rights Council, in line with its mandate to prevent violations and to respond promptly to human rights emergencies, has a vital role to play in ensuring much-needed reporting on the current crisis, evidence collection, and to support efforts to hold perpetrators to account, such as the ongoing International Criminal Court investigation in Congo.

In this context, we the undersigned human rights organizations, respectfully call upon all states at the Human Rights Council to act as a matter of urgency to address the current crisis, and send a signal to all parties to the conflict that they will be held accountable for serious crimes they commit. The Council should urgently establish an independent mandate to:

- **Undertake a thorough investigation** into all violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the current conflict, including those constituting crimes under international law, since the resurgence of the M23 in late 2021;
- **Establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of current violations and abuses;**
- **Collect, consolidate, preserve and analyze evidence** of such violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, and systematically record and preserve all information, documentation and evidence, including interviews, witness testimony and forensic material, consistent with international standards and best practices, in view of any future legal proceedings;
- **Identify, where possible, those individuals and entities allegedly responsible** for serious violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law, including those constituting crimes under international law, with a view to ensuring that they are appropriately held to account; and
- **Make recommendations to end violations and abuses and hold perpetrators to account**, with a view to ending impunity and ensuring the right to an effective remedy and to justice, truth and reparations for victims, survivors and their families.

The independent mandate should be asked to:

- Report regularly, including with regard to the findings of its investigations and recommendations for advancing accountability, to the UN Human Rights Council (given the urgency of the situation, a first written update should be provided no later than the Council’s 59<sup>th</sup> Session), and to the UN General Assembly;
- Integrate a gender perspective, a child rights perspective, and a survivor-centered approach throughout its work; and
- Ensure the complementarity and coordination of its work with other efforts of the United Nations, the African Union, and other appropriate regional and international entities, including the Human Rights Council’s [International Team of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Human Rights Council should urgently provide the necessary administrative, technical, and logistical support and personnel necessary to enable this mandate to be carried out without delay, in particular in the areas of fact-finding, legal analysis, translation and interpretation, and evidence-collection and preservation, including regarding sexual and gender-based violence and specialized ballistic and forensic expertise.

The creation of such a mandate would send an important message of deterrence to all commanders of warring parties at this critical juncture: that their abuses will be documented and exposed, and they will ultimately be held to account. It could also support the work of the International Criminal Court, which is currently focusing renewed investigative efforts into crimes committed by all parties in North Kivu since January 2022, or any other justice mechanism.

We appeal to you to work towards the establishment of the above mandate, and we stand ready to provide any more information as necessary.

Signed:

1. 11.11.11
2. Action des Chrétiens Activistes des Droits de l'Homme à Shabunda
3. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture – RDC
4. Action Globale pour la Promotion Sociale et la Paix
5. Action pour la Restauration de la Paix et la Justice
6. Action pour le Développement Intégral et Durable
7. Action Sociale pour la Paix et les Droits Humains
8. Actions des Chrétiens pour la promotion de la Paix et du Développement
9. Actions Rapides des Développements
10. African Center for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights
11. African Social Cohesion and Entrepreneurship Network
12. Agir ensemble pour les droits humains
13. Agir RDC
14. Amis des Droits de l'homme en DR Congo
15. Amnesty International
16. Assistance Internationale pour le Développement
17. Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de L'Homme
18. Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de l'Homme - section du Katanga
19. Association d'Actions de Paix et de Développement Communautaire
20. Association des Cultivateurs des Collectivités de Batangi et Bamate
21. Association pour la Santé et Développement de l'Enfant et la Femme
22. Association pour le Développement des Initiatives Paysannes
23. Association pour les droits de l'homme et droit humanitaire
24. Badilika droits humains
25. Centre d'Observation des Droits de l'Homme et d'Assistance Sociale
26. Centre de Recherche Dignity
27. Centre d'Espoir pour les Droits Humains
28. Centre Indépendant de Recherches et d'Études Stratégiques au Kivu
29. Centre pour la Justice et la Réconciliation
30. Coalition des Volontaires pour la Paix et le Développement
31. Commission Diocésaine pour la Justice et la Paix
32. Committee to Protect Journalists
33. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
34. Eglise du Christ au Congo/Ministère des Réfugiés et des Urgences
35. Espoir pour Tous au Congo
36. Fédération internationale de l'Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture
37. Fédération internationale des ligues des droits humains
38. Femmes Unies pour le Développement
39. Filimbi, mouvement citoyen

40. Fondation Bill Clinton pour la Paix
41. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
42. Groupe Lotus
43. Héritiers de la Justice
44. Human Rights Defenders Network-Sierra Leone
45. Human Rights Watch
46. Initiative pour la Protection des Droits de l'Homme et la Réinsertion Sociale
47. International Commission of Jurists
48. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
49. International Service for Human Rights
50. Justicia Asbl
51. La voix du savoir
52. Ligue des défenseurs des droits des malades
53. Ligue des Droits de la personne dans la région des Grands Lacs
54. Ligue des Électeurs
55. Ligue Internationale des Conseillers
56. Ligue Nationale Paysanne des Droits de l'Homme
57. Lutte Pour Le Changement
58. Monde d'Espoir-RDC
59. Nobel Women's Initiative
60. Nouvelles Dynamiques pour le Développement Rural Intégral
61. Nouvelle société civile congolaise
62. ONG Mama Ni Mama
63. Organisation pour le bien être des Albinos
64. Ouvriers du Monde
65. Parliamentarians for Global Action
66. Pax Christi International
67. Pona Ekolo, mouvement citoyen
68. Protection International
69. Psychologues Sans Frontières
70. Solidarité Féminine Pour la Paix et le Développement
71. Solsoc
72. SOS Information Juridique Multisectorielle
73. Synergie de défense et protection des défenseurs des droits humains, victimes et témoins
74. Umoja-Africa RDC
75. Women International Peace Centre