
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC) Over 200 detainees, including around 100 street children

Over 200 people, including up to 100 street children, have been arrested by police in Kinshasa, after a violent demonstration that followed a fatal police shooting. Some of the children are only five or six years old, and are being held in conditions likely to endanger their health. Some of the detainees were beaten during their arrest and are said to require medical treatment. Arrests of street children, apparently arbitrary, are continuing.

On the morning of 15 August a young man of about 18 was shot dead by a police officer at Kinshasa's central market. He had allegedly been caught stealing and had thrown scalding water from a tea urn over a police officer as he tried to escape. The police officer sustained severe burns, and a second officer reportedly opened fire on the man, killing him on the spot. This officer is now understood to be under arrest.

Dozens of street children converged on the market after the shooting and staged a violent protest, ransacking the market and setting fire to a local police station. A police officer working at the station was severely beaten and stabbed, and later died from his injuries in the early hours of 16 August.

Police made scores of arrests, and by the evening of 16 August at least 220 people were in custody at the Provincial Police Directorate (*Direction provinciale de la Police*), 89 of them children under 10, some as young as five or six. One of the young women detained has her baby with her, who is less than a year old. Several other detainees are under 18, while the rest are adults.

A number of the detainees were injured by being beaten and bound during their arrest and are reported to require medical treatment, which has not yet been provided. While the detainees are not considered to be at risk of further beatings or of torture in detention, the conditions in which they are being held constitute ill-treatment. They are kept outdoors in a courtyard, where they are also obliged to sleep. It is cold at night, and the detainees are only receiving one small ration of bread a day. This has raised concerns for their well-being, especially as many are very young.

Arrests of street children were reported to be continuing into the night of 16 August. While Amnesty International recognises the right of the authorities to bring to justice those suspected of involvement in the violence at the central market or in the killing of the police officer, the organisation fears that many children are being arrested arbitrarily, simply because they are living on the streets rather than because there is any substantive evidence of wrongdoing against them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are several thousand children living on the streets of Kinshasa who have little or no means of support. Many have been abandoned by their families, who do not have the resources to support them or to pay their school tuition fees. Some are former child soldiers who have been demobilised but not reintegrated into society; many of these are from other regions of the DRC and have no family in the capital.

Street children are a particularly vulnerable social group, whose basic human rights are rarely respected or even acknowledged. They are frequently the victims of arbitrary arrest, detention and ill-treatment, a situation made worse by the fact that they cannot rely on relatives to locate them, organise legal assistance or bring them food. Hundreds of street children have also been forcibly conscripted into the Congolese armed forces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- recognising the right of the authorities to bring to justice those responsible for criminal acts, but expressing concern at the detention of around 100 children, some as young as five years old, and over 100 adults in health-threatening conditions and urging that steps be taken to ensure the physical well-being of all the detainees, including the provision of adequate food;
- expressing concern that many of those arrested on 15 August were ill-treated during arrest, and urging the authorities to ensure that those injured during arrest are given any medical treatment they need;
- expressing concern that street children are still being arrested apparently arbitrarily, rather than because there is any substantive evidence of wrongdoing against them;
- deploring both the shooting dead of a young man at the central market on 15 August and the killing of a police officer, and urging a thorough investigation into these deaths with a view to bringing those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to issue clear instructions to all police officers reminding them that they may use lethal force or firearms only in exceptional circumstances in accordance with relevant international standards, notably the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

APPEALS TO:

(Please note that the fax numbers given are difficult to get through to - please be patient and keep trying.)

Minister of Human Rights
 Professeur Ntumba Luaba
 Ministre des Droits humains
 Ministère des Droits humains
 33/C Boulevard du 30 juin
 Kinshasa-Gombe
 Democratic Republic of Congo
Fax: + 243 12 20 664

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Social Affairs
 Madame Jeanne EBAMBA Boboto
 Ministre des Affaires sociales
 Ministère des Affaires sociales
 Kinshasa-Gombe
 République Démocratique du Congo
Fax: + 243 12 20 664 (c/o Ministry of Human Rights)
Salutation: Madame le Ministre

Inspector General of Police
Commandant KATSUVA wa Katsuvira
Inspecteur général de la Police
Inspection générale de la Police
Ministère de l'Intérieur
Kinshasa-Gombe
République démocratique du Congo
Fax: + 243 12 20 843 (c/o Ministry of Justice)
Salutation: Monsieur l'Inspecteur général

and to diplomatic representatives of the Democratic Republic of Congo accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 September 2001.