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Democratic Republic of Congo:

One year on – no more excuses President Kabila

President Kabila's year in power has been marked by a deliberate and calculated policy to kill, maim, torture, and arbitrarily arrest untold numbers of innocent civilians, Amnesty International declared in a report released today.

"Over the past year, ordinary people in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have had their hopes crushed as the new government has done everything in its power to stamp out any dissent in the country," the organization said.

Amnesty International is publishing its report, *DRC: A year of dashed hopes* (AI Index: AFR 62/18/98), on the anniversary of the coming to power of the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo* (AFDL) to urge the international community not to be complacent in the face of atrocities ordered or condoned by the new government. It is also reminding the government of the promises it made a year ago to promote the rule of law.

"The silence and complicity of world governments during past decades eroded the rule of law in the former Zaire and could do exactly the same in the new DRC," Amnesty International warned. "It is time to put an end to tolerance of human rights abuses and take action for the protection human rights."

World governments should start by pressurizing the DRC Government into co-operating with investigations into human rights abuses and prevent the supply of arms which are being used against unarmed civilians. Indeed, after a year of repeated obstruction of a United Nations (UN) investigation into massacres and other human rights abuses which occurred since 1993, the UN Secretary-General decided to withdraw his investigative team on 17 April. One of its members was arrested and his documents, which included names of witnesses, were taken away and photocopied raising fears for those who provided information to the team.

Unarmed individuals and groups of people have been targeted for their known or suspected support for armed government opponents. One of the most recent massacres took place between 25 March and 7 April, when about 54 Rwandese refugees and at least 100 Congolese civilians were unlawfully executed by AFDL forces in Shabunda, South-Kivu province.

As many as 900 civilians in and around the town of Butembo in North-Kivu province were reportedly killed by AFDL forces -- allegedly supported by Ugandan and Rwandese government forces -- between 20 February and mid-April 1998. The killings took place in the context of joint operations by the forces of the three governments against their armed opponents from the three countries.

"When it comes to Congolese citizens voicing their opinion or forming opposition groups, there has been a clear reversal of the gains achieved since April 1990 when opposition political parties were formally recognized," Amnesty International said.

One of the most prominent opposition leaders targeted is Etienne Tshisekedi, leader of the *Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social* (UDPS), Union for Democracy and Social Progress. He was arrested in Kinshasa on the night of 12 February -- partly for meeting Reverend Jesse Jackson, the US President's special envoy, then visiting Kinshasa. He was banished to Kabeya-Kamwanga village in Kasai-Oriental province.

Human rights activists, who in the final years of former President Mobutu's rule had developed a culture of standing up for their rights, have also come under severe attack since the AFDL came to power. For example, the *Association zairoise de défense des droits de l'homme* (AZADHO), Zairian Association for the Defence of Human Rights, was banned on 3 April.

Many human rights activists have been detained for their human rights work. They include Paul Nsapu and Sabin Banza, leaders of the *Ligue des électeurs*, Electorate's League, who were arrested on 27 April and detained by the *Agence nationale de renseignements* (ANR). They were arrested on their way from a meeting at the Belgium Embassy in Kinshasa. In early April, the DRC authorities accused Belgium of involvement in terrorism against the AFDL Government.

Journalists have been detained, ill-treated and their newspapers seized and radios silenced simply for criticizing the government. For example, Albert Bonsange Yema, editor-in-chief of *Le Palmarès* newspaper, has been detained since February because his newspaper published an article criticizing the arrest of Joseph Olengha Nkoy. Amnesty International is concerned that he is being denied medical care and appropriate diet for his diabetes and rheumatism.

Many of those arrested have been beaten and tortured in custody. Torture also often includes rape of women. About 30 members of the UDPS, including Vovo Bossongo and Honoré Kabeya, were reportedly tortured, including with electroshock batons, after their arrest on 17 January. Talking about his torture experience, Kabeya said, "*They wanted me to lie down but I resisted and so they forced me. They touched me with an electroshock baton on the genitals. I felt some kind of current in my body and I fell down*".

A military court set up in August 1997 to try cases of undisciplined soldiers has presided over unfair trials and sentenced dozens of soldiers and civilians to death. More than 50 of these have been executed since January 1998. Most of those tried by the court have no access to legal counsel and are automatically denied the right to appeal to a higher court against their convictions and sentence. Political detainees, including prisoner of conscience Joseph Olengha Nkoy, were being tried by the court at the start of May.

"For the people of the DRC to end the long human rights nightmare, the government must earn the international community's respect by safeguarding the fundamental rights of its people," Amnesty International said. "It should instruct its security forces not to perpetrate

human rights violations and it should establish the truth about the horrendous abuses suffered by its citizens during the previous decades -- only then may there may be hope of peace and stability in the country.”

*Source: Amnesty International, International Secretariat,
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