



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
XX May 2025

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Fifty-ninth session

16 June–11 July 2025

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2025]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

## **The Persecution of Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

1. This information has been directly conveyed to us by our local partner, Africa New Day, an NGO active in Goma, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Committed to breaking the cycles of violence, poverty, and inequality fueled by a lack of knowledge, poor governance, and the absence of opportunities, Africa New Day has been working since 2005 to provide sustainable and long-term solutions. The organization works directly with internally displaced persons (IDPs), the Church, and more broadly, the affected population in eastern DRC.

### **I. Targeted Persecution of Christians in the DRC**

2. The eastern region of the DRC is once again sinking into violence. In early January 2025, the M23 rebel group, supported by Rwanda, launched a major offensive in North Kivu province, resulting in the deaths of 7,000 Congolese and the displacement of 500,000 people. The severe humanitarian crisis currently unfolding in the DRC is rooted in long-standing conflicts in the east of the country, which have persisted since the end of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and is exacerbated by repeated natural disasters and epidemics. With the Congolese state too weak to protect its population, the United Nations launched a funding appeal on 27 February 2025, seeking \$2.54 billion (EUR 2.44 billion) to assist 11 million people in need.

3. This chaotic situation provides fertile ground for targeted executions and religious persecution by Islamist terrorist groups, particularly the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Originally a Ugandan rebel group, the ADF has been affiliated with the Islamic State since 2019 and is designated a terrorist organization by both the United States and the United Nations. The ADF has carried out massacres and abductions specifically targeting Christian communities.

4. In eastern DRC, civilians—and especially Christians—are caught between the atrocities committed by Islamist terrorists on one side, and the clashes between Congolese government forces and M23 rebels on the other. Following the fall of Goma, UNICEF recorded nearly 600 cases of rape in a single week, perpetrated by both M23 rebels and Congolese soldiers.

5. On 15 February 2025, more than 70 Christian civilians were beheaded inside a Protestant church in Kasanga, North Kivu. The victims—mainly women, children, and elderly people—had been abducted a few days earlier from the village of Mayba by ADF militants. This massacre is part of a broader pattern of religious persecution in the region. In June 2024, the ADF killed 150 Congolese, many of them Christians, in North Kivu, using firearms and machetes. At the time, Pope Francis condemned the attacks, referring to the victims as "martyrs of the faith."

6. The targeted nature of the attacks against Christians in eastern DRC was officially recognized by the European Parliament in a resolution adopted on 3 April 2025 (2025/2612(RSP)).<sup>(1)</sup> This resolution calls for the implementation of targeted sanctions to defend freedom of religion and ensure the security of the population.

7. Previously, during the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also echoed concerns regarding the targeted persecution of Christians, citing reports from NGOs and the local Church:

"The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) reported the killings and aggressions of Christians by the Islamic extremist group called the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Open Doors International noted that, in 2021, the Archbishop of Bukavu had reported a rise in attacks on Christians, including assaults on seven parishes, a school, a health center and a

convent. The Archbishop of Bukavu had highlighted those attacks from ADF often occurred near law enforcement stations and criticized the lack of effective government authority.”(2)

In this context, the Holy See recommended that the DRC “Increase efforts to end the targeted killings of Christians in the east of the country.”(3)

8. Yet, despite this recognition, some voices dispute this reality, denouncing what they consider to be misinformation. According to these critics:

- The DRC is a predominantly Christian country (over 80% of the population), which they argue makes targeted persecution unlikely;

- The ADF is described as an opportunistic terrorist group, committing acts of indiscriminate violence against anyone it encounters, without any religious motivation.

## II. The ECLJ at the Service of Congolese Martyrs for Their Christian Faith

9. These minimizing narratives, which deny the specific nature of Christian persecution, deeply shocked the Congolese delegation that the ECLJ accompanied to the European Parliament and the European Commission in Brussels from 13 to 16 May 2025. Camille and Esther Ntoto, founders of the NGO Africa New Day and direct witnesses to the situation, personally know the victims, their families, and their stories. For them, such attempts to obscure the truth only deepen the suffering.

10. The Ntoto couple shared heart-wrenching testimonies. Joseph, Marie—names that are overtly Christian—can become a death sentence in areas controlled by the ADF. Testimonies also reveal indoctrination sessions imposed by the ADF, during which abductees are forced to recite the Quran and perform Muslim prayers.

11. Among the many stories heard, Déborah’s testimony is particularly shocking. This brutal account illustrates the extreme manifestations of religious hatred. This young woman, a member of a local church, was arrested by a group of ADF militants. They repeatedly asked her if she was willing to renounce her faith in Jesus Christ. When she refused, they said: “Then you will suffer before we kill you.” That marked the beginning of her torment. As she sang praises to God, they raped her one after another, stabbed her, and forced leaves and branches into all her body’s orifices. They then left her naked in the bush, believing her to be dead. A group of villagers, accustomed to such horror scenes, found her body while returning from the fields. As they approached to cover her with dignity, they realized she was still alive. She was rushed to a clinic, where she was able to tell her story... before passing away a few hours later. A few days later, that same clinic was destroyed by the ADF.

12. At the same time this written statement is being submitted, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons is conducting a visit to the DRC (19–30 May 2025). To assist in preparing for her mission, the ECLJ submitted a report in advance, based on first-hand information relayed by our local source, Africa New Day.(4)

13. The ECLJ has launched an international campaign demanding justice, accountability, and urgent protection for Christian communities. We have formally appealed to key international institutions, urging them to take action against these crimes against humanity and to ensure the security of civilians. The advocacy work in Europe, and previously in the United States, carried out by the Ntoto couple, aims to amplify the voices of millions of victims and to prompt concrete and lasting action in response.(5)

14. The ECLJ recommends the following actions:

- Urge the government of the DRC to prosecute those responsible for the massacres and to strengthen its protection of Christian communities.
- Eliminate the threat posed by the ADF, particularly its targeted attacks against Christians in the region.
- Exert pressure on Rwanda to end its support for the M23 rebel group, which has exacerbated regional instability.
- Dismantle the M23 rebel threat and ensure the immediate return of all territories under its control to DRC sovereignty.
- Promote locally driven aid efforts through sustainable partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) rooted in local realities.

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- (1) European Parliament resolution of 3 April 2025 on the targeted attacks against Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: defending religious freedom and security (2025/2612(RSP)), 3 April 2025, § 3.
  - (2) Summary of stakeholders' submissions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/WG.6/47/COD/3, 30 August 2024, § 23.
  - (3) Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, A/HRC/58/6, 30 December 2024, § 141.130.
  - (4) Contribution by the ECLJ for the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
  - (5) Valeurs actuelles, « Enlèvements, viols, exécutions sommaires... Le cri de détresse des Congolais », 20 May 2025.