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**Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration
and Programme of Action**

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.

[04 August 2025]

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

Requesting That The UN Take Action Regarding Persecution Of Christians In The Democratic Republic Of The Congo (DRC)

1. INTRODUCTION

This written statement aims to draw the attention of the Human Rights Council to the growing persecution of Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Some of this information has been directly conveyed to us by our local partner, Africa New Day, an NGO active in Goma, eastern DRC. The organization works directly with internally displaced persons (IDPs), churches, and more broadly, the affected population in the eastern DRC.

2. BACKGROUND

The eastern region of the DRC is succumbing to violence once again, including religious persecution of Christians. There are reportedly 100 armed groups operating in the DRC.(1) These include the M23 rebel group and Islamist terrorist groups like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).(2) Eastern DRC civilians are tragically caught between the atrocities committed by Islamist terrorists on one side, and the clashes between Congolese government forces and M23 rebels on the other.

Of the armed groups, the M23 rebels are arguably the strongest.(3) Supported by Rwanda, they launched a major offensive in the North Kivu province in early January 2025, resulting in the deaths of 7,000 people from January to July 2025,(4) and displacing 500,000 people in Goma.(5)

The conflict has also provided opportunity for the persecution of Christians by Islamist terrorist groups. In particular, the ADF specifically targets Christian communities. The ADF has been affiliated with the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) since 2019, including receiving financial support from ISIL.(6) The ADF is armed with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), small arms, and mortars, and the group reportedly controls schools for children, clinics, prisons, and camps with internal security services.(7) The United States and the United Nations have designated the ADF as a terrorist organization.

The ADF's goal is to establish Islamic law in the region. ADF terrorists often capture Christians and kill those who refuse to convert.(8) Names that are overtly Christian, such as Joseph and Marie, can become a death sentence in ADF-controlled areas. The ADF also imposes indoctrination sessions where abductees are forced to recite the Quran and perform Muslim prayers.

One testimony among many stories is especially shocking and an illustration of an extreme manifestation of religious hatred. Déborah's testimony is a brutal account. This young woman and member of a local church was arrested by a group of ADF militants. These militants asked her repeatedly if she was willing to renounce her faith in Jesus Christ. Upon her refusal, the militants told her: "Then you will suffer before we kill you." That marked the beginning of her torture. The militants raped her one after another, stabbed her, and forced branches and leaves into all her body's orifices. While they inflicted these atrocities on her, she sang praises to God. The ADF militants left her naked in the bush, believing she was dead. A group of villagers who were accustomed to such horrific scenes, found her while returning from the fields. As they approached to cover her with dignity, the villagers realized she was still alive. They rushed her to a clinic, and she was able to tell her story. However, she passed away a few hours later. Just a few days later, the same clinic was destroyed by the ADF.

Tragically, Déborah's testimony is one of many Christians being persecuted in the eastern DRC. From M23 rebel violence and ADF violence targeting Christians specifically, the Christian community of the eastern DRC has undergone tremendous hardship in the past year. On 31 July, the DRC and Rwanda held a first meeting for a joint oversight committee to implement a peace deal.⁽⁹⁾ They were joined by the African Union, United States, and Qatar.⁽¹⁰⁾ This was preceded by a 27 June 2025 meeting where Rwanda and the DRC signed a peace deal.⁽¹¹⁾ That deal aimed to end the fighting and implement a 2024 deal to withdraw Rwandan troops from the eastern Congo within a 90-day period.⁽¹²⁾ Further, it stated the parties were to facilitate and support the capacity of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) to protect civilians.⁽¹³⁾ Additionally, UNHCR and United Nations Security Council resolutions and agreements were also included in the agreement to safely return refugees and provide humanitarian assistance.⁽¹⁴⁾

Although the 2025 agreement is a good first step towards peace in the eastern DRC, it does not address direct violence and persecution against Christians.

3. VIOLATIONS

On 27 July 2025, ADF members stormed a Catholic church where about 100 people were gathered for a vigil in the Komanda region.⁽¹⁵⁾ The attackers killed approximately forty people.⁽¹⁶⁾ The ECLJ's on-the-ground sources say the attack occurred between midnight and one in the morning. The ADF rebels opened fire on the victims⁽¹⁷⁾ and used machetes, hammers, and bladed weapons to kill. Thirty-eight people were killed in the church and five were killed in a village nearby.⁽¹⁸⁾ Among those killed were nine children,⁽¹⁹⁾ and several children were kidnapped.⁽²⁰⁾ The rebels also burned dozens of homes and shops.⁽²¹⁾ The attackers fled prior to security forces arriving⁽²²⁾ and the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.⁽²³⁾ Several local residents are still missing as of 30 July and 30,000 people are newly displaced in the Ituri province because of the attack.⁽²⁴⁾

The horrific attack in Komanda was not an isolated incident. The Komanda attack was preceded by another attack on 21 July, when the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO) armed group attacked civilians on Djugu territory and desecrated a Catholic parish in Lopa.⁽²⁵⁾

A little over a week prior to the Djugu attack, there was an attack on 8 and 9 July, where an ADF assault killed forty-one civilians in Irumu territory in Ituri.⁽²⁶⁾ In May, the ADF killed eighteen civilians in an attack on the Babili sector of North Kivu.⁽²⁷⁾ On 8 March, the ADF violently attacked the village of Ngite in North Kivu's Beni territory and killed four people.⁽²⁸⁾ One victim was a woman who was burned alive in her home.⁽²⁹⁾

Even earlier this year, on 15 February, over seventy Christian civilians were beheaded at a Protestant church in Kasanga, North Kivu. The victims were primarily women, children, and the elderly who had been kidnapped from their village just a few days earlier by ADF militants.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) found that since the start of July, ADF-attributed attacks in Irumu and Beni territories have caused over 100 civilian deaths, displacing more than 50,000 people.⁽³⁰⁾

4. REQUEST

The ECLJ recommends the following actions:

- Demand the DRC's government to prosecute those who are responsible for the massacres and strengthen its governmental protection of Christian communities.
- Eliminate the threat posed by the ADF and its support from the Islamic State.

- Work with Rwanda to fulfill the June 2025 peace deal and see to an end in the violence in the eastern Congo.
- Work to achieve the goal of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reaffirms each individual's right "to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance" in the DRC.

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 - (2) Id.
 - (3) Id.
 - (4) Democratic Republic of the Congo, GLOB. CTR. FOR THE RESP. TO PROTECT (15 JULY 2025).
 - (5) Patricia Pouhe & Desire Cimerhe, Amid the crackling of bullets: suffering in eastern DR Congo, NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL (21 Feb. 2025).
 - (6) Lawal, supra note 1.
 - (7) Lawal, supra note 1.
 - (8) Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Voice of the Martyrs.
 - (9) DR Congo and Rwanda Hold First Talks Since Signing of Peace Deal, ALJAZEERA (1 Aug. 2025).
 - (10) Id.
 - (11) Nimi Princewill, As Two African Nations Sign a Peace Deal, Trump Wants Credit. But Some Fear Peace May Still Elude Them, CNN WORLD (27 June 2025).
 - (12) Daphne Psaledakis & Sonia Rolley, Rwanda, Congo Hold First Meeting of Joint Oversight Committee Under Peace Deal, REUTERS (31 July 2025).
 - (13) Peace Agreement Between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda, Dem. Rep. Congo-Rwanda, art. 5, 27 June 2025.
 - (14) Id. art. 4.
 - (15) Id.
 - (16) Scores Killed in DR Congo Attack on Catholic Church, VATICAN NEWS (28 July 2025, 12:03).
 - (17) Ope Adetayo, What to Know About the Attack on a Congolese Church that Killed Nearly 40 Worshippers, PBS (28 July 2025).
 - (18) Id.
 - (19) Id.
 - (20) Lawal, supra note 1.
 - (21) Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Attack on East Congo Church, REUTERS (29 July 2025).
 - (22) Adetayo, supra note 11.
 - (23) REUTERS, supra note 15.
 - (24) DRC: Around 30,000 displaced after ADF attack, PRENSA LATINA (30 July 2025).
 - (25) Press Release, MONUSCO Strongly Condemns the Resurgence of Violence in Djugu Territory and Deadly ADF Attacks in Ituri and North Kivu, MONUSCO (23 July 2025).
 - (26) Lawal, supra note 1.
 - (27) Id.
 - (28) ADF Rebels Attack Ngite Village, Kill 4, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (11 Mar. 2025).
 - (29) Id.
 - (30) Id.