

STATEMENT | 25 MAY 2023

ELECTIONS IN DR CONGO 2023: the EU must do everything possible to guarantee fundamental freedoms on the eve of the general elections

The European Network for Central Africa (EurAc) and its members condemn the brutal methods used by the Congolese National Police (PNC) to disperse the demonstration held on 20 May 2023 in Kinshasa. The European Union (EU) and its Member States must do everything possible to guarantee respect for the fundamental freedoms of the Congolese people throughout the country, and to contribute to the establishment of a climate conducive to the holding of free, transparent, credible, and peaceful elections in 2023.

This Saturday 20 May 2023 in Kinshasa, the peaceful march against the rising cost of living, growing insecurity and irregularities in the electoral process was violently repressed and dispersed by the PNC for not respecting the itinerary imposed by the provincial authorities. EurAc deplores the firing of tear gas, the arbitrary arrests, and the brutality of the security forces towards the demonstrators. Disturbing images of police violence and disproportionate use of state force have taken over social media, including one of a child being beaten by security forces. The toll of the crackdown is still provisional.

Following the march and the abuses of the PNC, the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO), which had deployed monitors on the route of the demonstration as part of its mandate as an election observer, denounced the fact that the government of the city of Kinshasa had "changed the route planned by the political opposition verbally, only 24 hours beforehand. This borders on provocation as this change was likely to disrupt the organisers' planning".

Similarly, the citizens movement La Lucha "condemns with the utmost energy the repression of the demonstration of 20 May 2023 in Kinshasa". It calls on the Congolese authorities to "immediately and unconditionally release all those arrested during the peaceful demonstration of 20 May 2023 and ensure that all public officials who are perpetrators and/or sponsors of reprehensible acts of repression are brought to justice".

These actions are taking place in a tense electoral context, due to disputes generated by shortcomings in the organisation of the elections, difficulties related to voter registration, the inaccessibility of some constituencies, and reported cases of corruption, in addition to the violence in the east of the country. With the elections only a few months away, the crackdown on the opposition demonstration this weekend in Kinshasa suggests that the preconditions for free, transparent, credible, and peaceful elections are not in place.

In this context, EurAc and its members welcome the [EU's position](#) and invite the EU to remain vigilant about the rest of the electoral process. The EU cannot waver in its commitment to human rights, and it is crucial that it publicly and firmly denounces any repression and violation of public freedoms and fundamental human rights such as:

- The freedom for all Congolese to demonstrate peacefully without fear of being killed, injured or arrested throughout the country;
- The freedom of the press and expression;
- The inclusiveness of candidates.

It is important that the EU and its Member States encourage the Congolese political institutions to respect their obligation to organise free, transparent, credible, and peaceful elections. EurAc recalls the need to set up a permanent and decentralised consultation framework with Congolese civil society actors and political parties at all stages of the electoral process in order to work towards restoring confidence in this process.

For more information

- ▶ Report : [2023 Elections in the DR Congo: Rectifying past mistakes to strengthen democracy](#)

About EurAc

The European Network for Central Africa (EurAc), created in 2003, aims to help the Great Lakes region build a better future. EurAc advocates for a strong, coherent, and sustainable commitment from the European Union and its Member States, integrated with a regional approach. EurAc brings together 34 European civil society organisations working in an on the region that support local civil society in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda in promoting peace and development, and in defending human rights.