

## [DR Congo: UN report finds 47 protesters killed, freedom of assembly curtailed by use of force](#)

The security services and defence forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) killed at least 47 people during anti-government protests over a 13-month period through 31 January 2018, a United Nations human rights report has found.

“It is particularly disturbing that security services and defence forces carry out this violence with almost [full impunity](#) which can be perceived as encouraging such repression,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN human rights chief, said in a press release on the report, which concluded that freedom of peaceful assembly was “severely restricted and often violently suppressed” by the authorities in 2017.

“We are seeing the quashing of dissent at all costs – even at the cost of human life – in the DRC by the systematic deployment of armed forces alongside the Police Nationale Congolaise to handle protests,” added the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

While some people armed with sticks and broomsticks attempted to perpetrate violence during some protests, the vast majority of demonstrators were peaceful, according to the report published on Monday by the UN human rights wing and the UN peacekeeping mission in the African country.

The report concluded that the use of excessive force – including lethal force – by the authorities was thus “unlawful, unjustified and disproportionate.”

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 January 2018, at least 47 people, including women and children, were killed in the context of demonstrations and there are indications that Congolese security services have attempted to cover up these serious human rights violations by removing the bodies of victims and obstructing the work of national and international observers, the report states.

The report describes the lack of compliance with national law and international standards related to the use of force during the suppression of peaceful demonstrations.

For her part, Leila Zerrougui, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative in the DRC, said the report highlights a continued shrinking of the democratic space in the country since the beginning of 2015.

“Demonstrations are intrinsically related to freedom of expression and it is absolutely necessary that all voices can be heard in the context of the forthcoming elections,” said Ms. Zerrougui, also the head of the UN peacekeeping mission, known as its French acronym [MONUSCO](#).

The two UN officials urged the Government to allow the exercise of the rights to peaceful assembly and expression, warning that repression would only breed frustration, could lead to serious deteriorations in the security situation in the country and could pose a threat to the electoral process.

For credible elections to be held at the end of this year, the Government has an obligation to ensure that people's civil and political rights are respected and their exercise is facilitated, they said.