

My Testimony on Human Rights situation in DR Congo
By Fred Bauma

Before I start, I would like, on behalf of my colleagues from the LUCHA movement and the youth of my country, thank the American Congress for the numerous efforts and initiatives for supporting democracy in Africa, making sure that human Rights are respected and observed in DRC but also fighting against the looting of our mineral resources.

Three months ago in Kinshasa, I was freed from prison where I spent seventeen months (17) in custody of which 50 days while being detained secretly, without any right to consult or access a lawyer, without being allowed family to visit me. The reason of my arrest: my fervent opposition to President Kabila's unwillingness to organize elections in order to maintain himself in power thus violating the constitution of our country.

My case is not an isolated one and not the worst; it is even becoming a normal routine every single day as we approach 19 December 2016, a date I would qualify of fateful, date to which President Kabila should leave power due to the Constitution.

Many people were killed during the protests that took place between January 2015 to September 2016 and thousands of people have been victims of arbitrary arrests, many others kidnapped and tortured by our national police, the Republican Guard (Garde Republicaine) and National Intelligence Agency (Agence Nationale de Renseignement).

At the same time, The judicial institutions, which should make sure that justice is restored have been nothing other than an other repressive hand of the current government; not hesitating to condemn civil society and opposition activists and with heavy unexplained penalties while only explaining pacifically their opinion.

The LUCHA movement paid the heaviest price in this fight for democracy. More than 150 activists of the LUCHA have been arrested, sometimes kidnapped more than once and tortured between March 2015 and October 2016; all of them youth activists under the age of 30. Three of them are still detained in prison in Goma waiting for a court decision.

To add on this, the rare free Medias that used to broadcast throughout the Congolese territory saw their signal being cut; Congolese and foreign journalists are regularly attacked, arrested, and some killed for just doing their work. In March 2015, when demonstrations erupted in Kinshasa and Goma against Kabila's attempt to stay in power, the government cut Internet and SMS for 3 months, causing innumerable damage to millions of Congolese, not only from a civic point of view (the right to information and communication), but also enormous economic losses for a population that is already among the poorest in the world. This is likely to happen again in the coming days.

The political space is sufficiently restricted for pacific activists thus only opening doors to only those who only believe in violence as the single way to solve conflicts.

The impunity towards war lords such as Gedeon Kyungu in the Katanga only confronts those who believe in violence compared to the harsh repression on pacific protestors.

This merciless repression has not stopped or discouraged us from our non-violent fight for a New Congo. Our fight is and goes beyond the mere personality of Kabila. It is for Peace, Social Justice, freedom, dignity... it is for not reliving the same cycles of violence we experienced and which most of us have known since the very tender age when we grew up. That's why we are

fighting.

This is not in any way a fight against the person of Kabila, it is firmly to reaffirm our commitment to the values written in our constitution. A hard-won constitution acquired following a long period of war which led to losses of millions of innocent lives, becoming the most deadly conflict after the Second World War with more than 6 million left dead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is unfortunately clear and obvious that there will be no elections this year in the Democratic Republic of Congo, this situation will plunged the country into a serious crisis of legitimacy, which may lead to stimulate a political agenda to the armed group that still plundering the east of the country. This situation may affect once again all the Great Lake region.

The main excuse branded by the Congolese government for not organizing the elections is lack of funding. Within this same period, millions of dollars of the Congolese people are being spent by the Congolese government to finance lobbies for the US government and the American Congress; some individuals close to the current government are involved in a large-scale looting of resources, corruption and large-scale diversion of public money, as revealed in recent scandals: the Panama Papers, the Lumumba Papers, and several other reports of international anti-corruption NGOs. All these scenarios often done using the American Dollar as currency which I believe also involves some American financial institutions.

The American Congress should more actively push the US government to apply more financial sanctions against those Congolese nationals and foreigners involved in many financial malpractices and scandals. These incidents and practices are constantly continuing to impoverish the Congolese People and all this for the benefits and interests of a particular group of people that I qualify of predators.

I therefore ask the Congress and this Commission to increase the surveillance on fraudulent financial transactions in American dollars that are handled through American financial institutions which benefit those who incessantly continue to consume the lives of innocent Congolese people.

Sanctions should also absolutely be taken against all the Congolese individuals directly involved in all kinds of actual repressions on pacific protesters and also people involved in numerous violations of human rights throughout the country. These oppressors have been identified and listed by many human rights activists' organizations. Today, LUCHA movement issued a list of 35 top Congolese officials and businessmen it calls "democracy predators", who should be subject to citizens' sanctions.

I will request that these sanctions to be taken should not only be symbolic like the ones taken recently against some Congolese officials. These sanctions should precisely target individuals and dignitaries in the entourage of President Kabila because in my opinion and LUCHA's, these sanctions should not only have for main purpose punishing the perpetrators but also increase pressure on the Congolese government in order to compel them to respect the constitution and the laws of DRC.

That's why these sanctions should be taken in time before 19 December in order to be useful and effective. It is very important that the United States act now because I am afraid that tomorrow will be too late.

Lastly, I should end my speech while talking about Beni, this territory in the Eastern part of DRC where for the past 2 years, innocent Congolese men, women and children are horribly being slaughtered and massacred with machetes forcing thousands of Congolese to flee their homes and villages.

And all these happening under the impassive watch and presence of MONUSCO; the biggest United Nations Mission in the World with a budget of more than one billion dollars every year of which the United States remain the major donors.

Failure of MONUSCO of carrying out its peacekeeping role in DRC means the failure of the United Nations to truly fulfill its duty.

The Congress should urge the United Nations to ensure that MONUSCO truly plays its role of a peacekeeping organization and not being a simple government's partner when it's in fact this same current government being the major source of danger against the security of Congolese citizens.

You have the power and chance to deeply change the current situation going on and avoiding to DRC and the Great Lakes Region to experience once again a serious humanitarian calamity.

The Congolese people are tired of dying and are only dreaming of a lasting peace.

What I ask for is solidarity on your part in order to help us build a free and democratic country at the heart of Africa.

Tomorrow will be late and the current regime is ready "to burn the house".

In order to prevent that DRC becomes a new Rwanda, Burundi or Liberia, in to avoid the statement "Never again", you have to act now and I believe you have the power to do so.

We have started a long journey towards freedom, and we ask the American Congress to join us and be on our side.

Thank you