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H.E. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo
President of the Democratic Republic of Congo
Office of the President of the Republic
Palais de la Nation
Gombe, Kinshasa

22 February 2019

Your Excellency Mr. President,

I write to you as Secretary General of Amnesty International, a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

I very much welcome the fact that during your inauguration speech on 24 January, you made the commitment to ensure that each citizen of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) enjoys their fundamental rights. As President, you have the responsibility and opportunity to ensure that your government moves swiftly to reverse the deteriorating human rights situation. I attach a 10-point proposal proposing recommendations in this regard.

Serious human rights violations and crimes under international law have been committed in the DRC for a long time, claiming the lives of millions of Congolese people over the last 25 years, mostly with impunity. According to the United Nations, thousands of people have been killed in the Beni, Kasai, Tanganyika and Ituri regions in recent years. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 890 people were massacred in Yumbi in the middle of the election campaign, in December 2018. Despite significant government efforts to end violence against women, rape and sexual violence continue to be used as weapons of war.

Amnesty International and other credible organizations have also documented multiple violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including crackdowns on peaceful protesters, arbitrary arrests and detentions including of critics and human rights defenders, and internet and media shutdowns. The suppression of protests in the context of the political crisis that began in January 2015 has left more than 300 people dead, thousands injured, and scores arrested, most of them opposition supporters, human rights defenders and civil society activists. While the victims still await justice, suspected perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity, with very few of them investigated or prosecuted.

Your government has the obligation to respect, protect, promote and fulfill human rights as enshrined in the DRC's Constitution and as part of the DRC's commitments to regional and international treaties and bodies. Therefore, I urge you to ensure that your government takes the following concrete steps:

- Ensure the **protection of civilians**, especially in areas affected by conflict and inter-communal

violence, by rapidly strengthening the capacity and commitment of Congolese security forces to effectively fulfil their duties, and by ensuring that the army, police and intelligence officers suspected of human rights violations or misconduct are suspended pending investigation and if there is sufficient admissible evidence, prosecution in fair trials;

- **End restrictions on civil society**, including by releasing prisoners of conscience and allowing activists exiled to return to the DRC and carry out their human rights work, ending crackdowns on peaceful protests, and by respecting and protecting media freedom;
- Ensure **accountability** for crimes committed in the context of conflict, in particular, crimes against women, notably sexual and gender-based violence including rape;
- Promote **gender equality** as enshrined under Article 14 of the DRC Constitution by ensuring the participation of women in the decision-making processes at the local, provincial and national levels.

The measures detailed in the attached 10-point agenda, although not exhaustive, would contribute to ensuring respect for human rights across the country and providing the victims with effective remedies.

I hope very much to meet you in person to discuss further the issues raised in this letter and am looking forward to meaningful engagement on human rights protection and promotion. In the meantime, I will be closely following your progress on securing human rights for the DRC's people.

Yours sincerely,

Kumi Naidoo

Secretary General