

# Republic of Congo | UN calls for a law on the protection of women human rights defenders

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The review of the 7th periodic report of the Republic of Congo by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) took place from 22 to 26 October 2018 in Geneva. Rencontre pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme, an NGO based in Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo, was able to participate in the review and present a joint report with ISHR.

'Women activists and defenders are facing all sorts of issues in Congo, including arrests, threats and persecutions. For example, women living in rural areas who seek to assert their rights are the main targets of companies which confiscate their lands, especially from the mining industry,' declared Jeiss Miyalou, a RPDH representative. 'There is an urgent need for the government to elaborate and adopt a law aimed at protecting human rights defenders.'

The joint report of RPDH and ISHR sheds light on the restrictions a freedom-destroying bill would impose on freedom of association, as it establishes terms of imprisonment and heavy fines that would have a negative impact on defenders' actions.

Acknowledging the magnitude of the challenges ahead, the Committee did not fail to raise the issue of women defenders during a dialogue with Congolese executive representatives.

In its recommendations, the Committee urges Congo to:

- Adopt and implement without delay efficient measures to protect women human rights defenders, including a legislation;
- Investigate efficiently all intimidation, harassment and threat cases against women human rights defenders, prosecute and punish properly those found guilty as well as provide effective legal remedies to victims;
- Enable women human rights defenders to freely participate in public affairs, including issues related to the management and follow-up of natural resources.

'These recommendations are all the more important to us as they add to our claims and support our advocacy efforts at national level,' said Jeiss Miyalou. 'Since they were issued by a treaty body, the recommendations of the CEDAW are legally binding.'

ISHR's Vincent Ploton agrees: 'Congo must comply with the recommendations of the CEDAW, according to the commitments undertaken through the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In order to achieve this, a plan to implement the recommendations should be adopted,' he concludes.

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