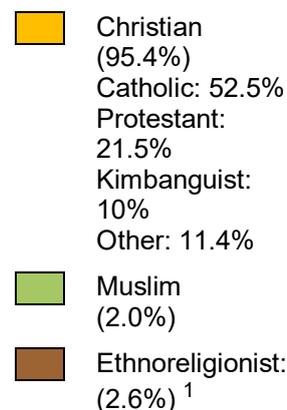
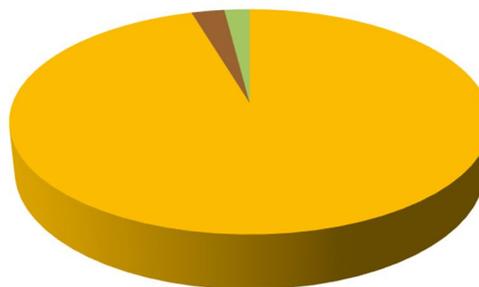
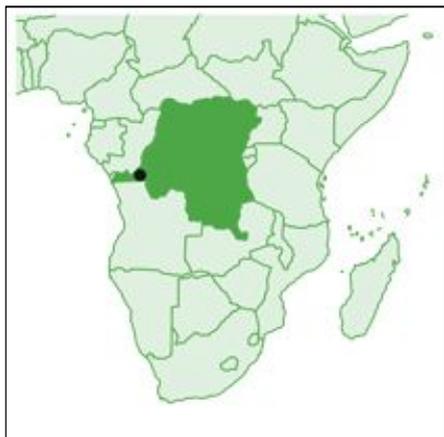


# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



**Area:**  
2,344,885 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:**  
74.9 million

**Political system:**  
Autocracy<sup>2</sup>

**Major Language(s):**  
French, Lingala, Kituba,  
Swahili, Tshiluba

## Legal Framework of freedom of religion and actual application

The 2006 constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo upholds the secular character of the state, which respects religious pluralism. Article 13 forbids all forms of discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, religious denomination or opinion.

Likewise, article 22 guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion: "Every person has a right to manifest his/her religion or his/her convictions, either alone or in group, in public and in private, by means of worship, teaching, practices, observance of rites and of the state of religious life, in a manner consistent to the respect to the law, public order and morals and the rights of other persons."

All religious groups must be registered, and their statutes have to be approved by the Ministry of Justice. They must also declare a list of their active members and every year present an annual report of their activities.

The Catholic Church enjoys tax-free status concerning imports of vehicles and drugs. The procedures for hiring foreign personnel to work as missionaries are relatively uncomplicated.

All religious groups have complete freedom to engage in proselytism, in catechesis and evangelisation, an activity that preachers carry out even in markets, street junctions and public buses, and which is seen as completely normal. Even at night, churches are free to hold religious functions or worship or formation. Because of the phenomenon, known as "Koluna" (youth criminality), moving at night can be dangerous in Kinshasa and some other towns. In order to avoid this risk, the faithful from different denominations may spend the whole night in their churches, until dawn.

There is freedom to build church premises and to raise funds for religious activities inside and outside the country.

In 1977, the Catholic Church and the state signed a memorandum of understanding concerning management of schools. The memorandum grants favourable conditions to Catholic schools,

including the right to change the personnel and to take any major administrative decisions, with the sole obligation of “informing” the Ministry of Education.

Religious education is part of the official syllabus and is taught in schools. The Catholic Church and other religious denominations run a wide range of institutions such as schools, health centres, and social work, including orphanages and media houses. Concerning the media, most TV channels and radio stations in Kinshasa belong to a Church.

## Incidents

Disputes between pastors from the different “Eglises de reveil” (born again evangelists who have been in DR Congo since the 1990s) have been rife for a long time and continued during the reporting period. There were many confrontations, insults and disqualifications. These incidents are usually regarded as internal conflicts and attempts to gain more followers at the expense of other congregations.

The Eglises du reveil have made highly confrontational accusations against the Catholic Church, especially concerning the latter’s position on certain political issues. On 28<sup>th</sup> November 2015, a communiqué from the Regroupement des Eglises de Reveil du Congo, signed by pastor Antoine Bishamba, accused the DR Congo’s Catholic Bishops’ Conference (CENCO) of meddling in politics. Criticising a peaceful demonstration the Catholic bishops had organised to demand that the Constitutional Order be respected, the Pentecostal pastors said that the bishops were acting “as blood-thirsty vampires playing the role of arsonists”.<sup>3</sup>

Controversy surrounding two presidential mandates, laid down in the 2006 constitution, have put the CENCO and the DR Congo authorities on a collision course. Since 2014, the opposition and civil society in DR Congo have often suspected President Joseph Kabila of trying to extend his rule – limited to two mandates according to the constitution – by using delay tactics to put off upcoming elections. According to reports, a national debate and a national census have been introduced before the polls, moves with the potential to delay an election for years. On 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014, the CENCO issued a statement demanding “absolute respect for the Constitution”.<sup>4</sup> In the communiqué, signed by the Bishop Nicolas Djomo of Tshumbe, the chairman of the CENCO, the bishops stated that “acting otherwise would entail a danger of unforeseeable consequences for the nation”.

A few days later, on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2014, the Catholic bishops published a document entitled “Should blood still flow in Congo”. While supporting the idea of a national debate, the bishops stated that the country’s situation was “worrying and of great concern”.<sup>5</sup> The CENCO criticised recent restrictions on civil liberties, as well as acts of repression and intimidation. The document also appealed to the nation to follow article 64 of the constitution. The article authorises citizens to block attempts to exert power in flagrant violation of the law. In response to this statement, on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015 the government closed the signal of *Radio Television Catholique Eililya* (RTCE), which remained shut down for six months.<sup>6</sup>

During the reporting period, Muslims in the country periodically accused the government of discriminating against them. At the end of 2014, the Communauté Islamique au Congo (COMICO), a body that claims to represent all Muslims in DR Congo, complained about the absence of a Muslim minister in the government. The COMICO also highlighted the fact that neither of the two main Muslim festivals were public holidays. Also, in eastern areas affected by ADF armed attacks, an extremist Muslim rebel group made up mainly of Ugandan fighters, Muslims in Beni and nearby towns, complained that some of their faithful were harassed and arbitrarily detained by the armed forces, known officially as FARDC.<sup>7</sup>

On 30<sup>th</sup> March 2016, Father Vincent Machozi, a Catholic priest from the order of the Assumptionists, was attacked at night by armed men in uniform while he was at his mother’s

village, 15 kilometres from the town of Butembo. The assailants dragged him out of his mother's house and shot him dead a few metres away. According to Father Emmanuel Kahindi, vicar general of the Assumptionists in Rome, Father Machozi had received three death threats in recent months. He was known for his human rights and advocacy work. He ran the website Beni Lubero, documenting atrocities committed against civilians in the province of North Kivu.<sup>8</sup>

### **Prospects for freedom of religion**

There is little reason to believe that improvements are coming soon.

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<sup>1</sup> Animists.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy\\_Index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index)

<sup>3</sup> <https://wazaonline.com/fr/wazavote-rdc/guerre-de-religion-en-gestation-en-rdc>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.la-croix.com/Urbi-et-Orbi/Actualite/Monde/Les-eveques-congolais-demandent-au-president-Kabila-de-respecter-la-Constitution-2015-11-16-1380950>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.la-croix.com/Urbi-et-Orbi/Actualite/Monde/Les-eveques-de-RDC-sur-le-dialogue-national-de-Joseph-Kabila-2015-11-30-1386858>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.jed-afrique.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=170:rdc-la-television-catholique-rouverte-apres-6-mois-de-fermeture-jed-reclame-la-reouverture-d-une-dizaine-d-autres-medias-fermes-arbitrairement&catid=87&Itemid=508](http://www.jed-afrique.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=170:rdc-la-television-catholique-rouverte-apres-6-mois-de-fermeture-jed-reclame-la-reouverture-d-une-dizaine-d-autres-medias-fermes-arbitrairement&catid=87&Itemid=508)

<sup>7</sup> <http://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/apr-s-des-massacres-en-rdc-les-musulmans-de-beni-se-plaignent-de>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mediacongo.net/article-actualite-16586.html>