**DR Congo: US, EU Should Expand Targeted Sanctions
*Increase Pressure on Those Unlawfully Enriched by Kabila’s Rule***(Brussels, October 10, 2017) – The [United States](https://www.hrw.org/united-states) and [European Union](https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/european-union) should expand targeted sanctions on President Joseph Kabila’s family members and financial associates benefitting from unlawful activity in the [Democratic Republic of Congo](https://www.hrw.org/africa/democratic-republic-congo), seven international and Congolese human rights organizations said today. The sanctions should target those involved in serious corruption, misuse of government funds, money laundering, or fraud in order to quash peaceful dissent, improperly delay elections, or otherwise maintain Kabila’s rule beyond the constitution’s two-term limit. The International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region of Africa, which includes the US, the EU, and the United Nations, will meet on October 12, 2017, in The Hague to discuss Congo’s political impasse and serious humanitarian and security concerns. “Congo’s international partners should show President Kabila that there are real consequences for his abusive rule by imposing sanctions on those family members and financial associates unlawfully benefitting from his unconstitutional power grab,” said [Ida Sawyer](https://www.hrw.org/about/people/ida-sawyer), Central Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Waiting any longer will only embolden Kabila’s use of violence, repression, and theft to stay in power, and the Congolese people will continue to pay the biggest price.”Congo is facing a growing human rights and security crisis since Kabila refused to step down at the end of his constitutionally mandated two-term limit in December 2016. He has retained power by [delaying elections](http://www.eurac-network.org/sites/default/files/eurac_briefing_processus_democratiques_et_impasses_politiques_dans_la_region_des_gl_role_de_lue_-_juin_2017.pdf), overseeing a brutal crackdown against peaceful dissent, and letting government security forces commit serious abuses across much of the country with impunity. Late last year, the Catholic Church mediated a [power-sharing agreement](https://www.hrw.org/content/298259) that called for elections to be held by the end of 2017, in which Kabila would not participate, and for a number of measures to ease tensions, including the release of political prisoners and the return of opposition leaders in exile. But since then, the ruling coalition has defied the main tenets of the agreement, most notably by not scheduling national elections. The head of Congo’s national electoral commission (Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante, or CENI) has publicly [said](https://actualite.cd/2017/07/07/rdc-ny-aura-delections-2017-corneille-nangaa/) that elections will not be held in 2017, and has yet to set a date. Kabila’s [address to the UN General Assembly](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/19/jig-congos-embattled-president) in September gave no indication that he is stepping down from office. Reports from his private meetings with various foreign officials in New York likewise did not suggest that he is preparing to give up power.Kabila’s refusal to step down may in part be explained by the [considerable fortune](https://www.hrw.org/content/307177) that he and his family have amassed since they came to power, the rights groups said. Recent reports by the [Congo Research Group](http://congoresearchgroup.org/) at New York University and [Bloomberg](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-07-18/diggers-drivers-diamonds-how-congo-s-zoe-kabila-makes-money) show how Kabila and his close family members have ownership stakes in more than 80 companies whose revenues total hundreds of millions of dollars since 2003. The reports also expose how major mining, oil, energy, and telecoms deals in Congo are exclusively managed by Kabila and his closest allies, with close family members and advisors often demanding bribes from companies looking to do business in the country.

Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of dollars paid by mining companies to state bodies in the past few years have “disappeared,” never making it to the national treasury, according to a report by [Global Witness](https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/democratic-republic-congo/regime-cash-machine/). The enormous cost of the elections proposed by the government – with estimates ranging from US$800 million to US$1.8 billion, some 20 percent of Congo’s current annual budget – also appears to have created opportunities for mismanagement and possible corruption, the groups said. The so-called “[Lumumba Papers](http://lumumbapapers.info/)” include leaked bank records from CENI’s account at Banque Gabonaise et Française Internationale (BGFI), whose chief executive officer is Kabila’s brother, and reveal unexplained financial transactions that appear to be inconsistent with the commission’s responsibility for the electoral process, according to the [Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa](https://pplaaf.org/) (Plateforme de Protection des Lanceurs d’Alerte en Afrique, PPLAAF), which worked together with the Congolese whistleblower and former BGFI banker [Jean-Jacques Lumumba](https://pplaaf.org/jean-jacques-lumumba.html). The [papers](https://pplaaf.org/downloads/BGFIBANK-RDC-censure.pdf) show that CENI officials, for example, withdrew $7.5 million in cash over a three-month period in 2016 without giving any explanation for the transactions. “For Congo’s government to claim it doesn’t have the cash to hold elections is cynical in the extreme, given how Kabila and his associates have gotten rich on the back of the Congolese people,” said Anneke Van Woudenberg, executive director of [Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID)](http://www.raid-uk.org). Since June 2016, the [US and EU have imposed targeted sanctions](http://www.eurac-network.org/sites/default/files/eurac_briefing_processus_democratiques_et_impasses_politiques_dans_la_region_des_gl_role_de_lue_-_juin_2017.pdf), including travel bans and assets freezes, against 17 Congolese individuals, mostly senior security force officers and government officials. These sanctions appear to have helped change behavior and affect the calculus of some top officials. Yet the lack of meaningful political reform combined with growing insecurity shows that greater international pressure on Kabila, particularly through expanded targeted sanctions, is needed, the groups said.

The groups urged the US and EU to publicly declare which assets have already been frozen under existing sanctions, to show the consequences of these measures. Contact Group members should investigate and prosecute companies and individuals in their jurisdiction – regardless of nationality – who unlawfully participate in corruption, money laundering, or fraud in Congo. Contact Group members should also work with regional leaders to press Kabila to step down from the presidency by the end of 2017, and to signal clearly that Kabila himself will be sanctioned if he does not do so. They should support consultations to determine the management and leadership of a brief post-Kabila transition led by individuals who cannot run for office themselves, as [proposed recently by civil society leaders and Catholic Church representatives](https://www.hrw.org/content/308000). Congo’s international and regional partners should actively monitor and support the process, including a peaceful transfer of power and the organization of fair, credible elections, the groups said. “We need bold action to end Congo’s seemingly endless cycles of violence, corruption, and impunity,” said Jean-Claude Katende, president of the African Association for the Defense of Human Rights (ASADHO). “International pressure on President Kabila to step down and support for a credible electoral process could finally put the Congolese people on a path toward a new system of governance, built on the rule of law, transparent and fair management of the country’s immense natural resources, and strong democratic institutions that put the interests of all Congolese at the heart of every political initiative.”

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