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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Liberal International (World Liberal Union), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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A Call for Democracy and Rule of Law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Liberal International (LI) welcomes the United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in particular resolutions 2293 (2016) on renewing the DRC sanctions regime and the mandate of the Group of Experts and 2277 (2016) on renewing the mandate of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). LI fully supports the conclusion of the resolutions that “the Government of the DRC as well as all relevant parties have to ensure an environment conducive to a free, fair, credible, inclusive, transparent, peaceful and timely electoral process, in accordance with the Congolese Constitution.”

This statement would like to pay specific attention to the urgent need for political reconciliation and restoration of the rule of law and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Recognising that:

-Joseph Kabila has been President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2001 with a constitutionally limited mandate of two terms which should have ended on 20 December 2016

-Presidential and legislative elections were initially scheduled to be held by the end of 2016 but were postponed over the past two years as a stalling tactic deployed by President Kabila in order to use administrative and technical means of delaying the election and remaining in power beyond the end of his constitutional mandate

-Since January 2015, Congolese security and intelligence officials have clamped down on peaceful activists and members of the opposition and of civil society who oppose attempts to allow President Kabila to stay in power past his constitutionally mandated two-term limit

-A first attempt to amend the Constitution of the DRC in order to allow President Kabila to run for a third term was initially aborted due to strong opposition from and the mobilisation of civil society

-According to a report by the UN Joint Human Rights Office, 422 human rights violations were committed by police officers and security forces during the demonstrations held between 19 and 21 September 2016

-Press outlets such as Radio France Internationale (RFI) and Radio Okapi have been shut down or jammed

Stressing on the fact that:

-More than 50 people were reportedly killed during demonstrations on 19 and 20 September 2016 in Kinshasa and many others disappeared

-The African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and the International Organisation of La Francophonie have jointly underscored the importance of such a national dialogue and the search for an agreement between political actors as demanded by the respect for democracy and the rule of law

-Human rights groups have repeatedly reported on the worsening situation of human rights and freedom of expression, assembly and demonstration in the country in the run-up to elections, including the use of excessive force against peaceful demonstrators, journalists, political leaders and others

-The ever-increasing level of violence and violations and infringements of human rights and international law, in particular targeted actions and arbitrary arrests, have a negative impact on any efforts to regulate and stabilise the situation in the DRC

-Humanitarian agencies have stated that political instability is plunging the country into chaos and causing its population, already weakened by the various past and present crises, to sink into extreme poverty and insecurity, with more than 5 million people currently in need of food assistance

Affirming that:

-On 31 December 2016 political parties, alongside main opposition groups, signed an agreement for a transition period with elections planned before the end of 2017 calling for a prime minister to be selected from the opposition and for additional power-sharing

-The recent and sudden death of Congolose opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi on 2 February 2017 has the potential of leaving a vacuum in the DRC political opposition at a particularly important moment when a peaceful transitional agreement has nearly been agreed

-The role LI member parties Alliance Pour le Renouveau du Congo and Union Pour la Reconstruction Du Congo have played and continue to play in the transition agreement and the overall return of democracy and rule of law to the country remains crucial

Recalling:

-LI Written Statement to the 31st Session of the UN Human Rights Council on the Deterioration of the State of Democracy and Rule of Law around the world which at the time expressed grave concern about the significant delay on the part of the DRC government and the national independent electoral commission in fulfilling their responsibility to organize local, provincial, parliamentary and presidential elections in the country

-LI World Today Resolution as adopted by the 60th Congress of the federation in Mexico City which urged the DRC government to hold elections within the constitutional deadline in a free and fair manner refraining from all violence

Calls on:

-On the African Union to closely monitor the political accord of the 31 December 2016 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and fully support the accord's provisions for the establishment of a transitional government of national unity

-On the United Nations to establish an Independent Commission of Inquiry in order to conduct full, thorough and transparent investigation into the alleged human rights violations that took place during the protests and identify those responsible holding them to an account

- On all political actors to engage in a peaceful and constructive dialogue in order to prevent any deepening of the current political crisis and to refrain from further violence and provocations

-On the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) to continue with its efforts to forge a wider consensus over the political transition

-On the upcoming DRC government of national unity to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and lift all restrictions on the media

-On the upcoming DRC government of national unity to proceed with the updating of the electoral roll, with the logistic and technical support of the UN's Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), and to take all necessary action to create an environment that is conducive to holding free, fair and credible elections no later than December 2017

-On the international community to closely monitor the implementation of the political accord and offer full political assistance to the transition process

Commits:

-For liberal parliamentarians in government and in opposition across the world to take a firm stand in their parliaments and speak up in support of the political agreement reached between members of the Congolese majority and opposition groups on 31 December 2016

-For Liberal International Human Rights Committee to raise the issue of political reconciliation in the DRC before members of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) by making an oral statement
