



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 17 October 2005
13400/05 (Presse 269)
P 114/05

**Statement by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on freedom of expression in the Democratic Republic of Congo
(DRC)**

The European Union is concerned about freedom of expression in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Between January and August 2005 Journalistes En Danger (JED) reported 37 cases of imprisonment of journalists, compared with 23 similar arrests in the whole of 2004.

The right to freedom of expression is fundamental to democracy and a fundamental freedom laid down in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, as well as in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and African Charter on Human and People's Rights, to which the Democratic Republic of Congo is a State Party. Freedom of Expression is also a requirement for the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals.

The EU supports the principles contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1999.

P R E S S

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The protection of freedom of expression will be of paramount importance in the run-up to elections in DRC. The European Union supports the work of the Haute Autorite des Medias (HAM). The HAM plays a key role and the EU encourages it to monitor the media objectively and impartially in the run-up to elections to ensure that all parties have equal access to airtime and to prevent hate media. HAM has a particular role in monitoring the output of the state-owned Radio Television Nationale Congolaise (RTNC) to ensure that no single political party has privileged access to its airwaves to the detriment of others. To this end the EU encourages the HAM to ensure that terms of access to the RTNC and coverage provided by RTNC respects the principals of impartiality and equality. It further urges the HAM and all parties to do their utmost to prevent language inciting ethnic or other tension from being used during broadcasts on all media channels.

The EU notes with concern the recent disputes between HAM and the Ministry of information. The EU would like to underline the importance that both entities work together in a positive way respecting their own and each others roles and boundaries. The EU further notes the important role of other Congolese organisations in the regulation, the organisation and the protection of the media and of journalists, namely the Observatoire des Medias Congolais (OMEC), L'Union Nationale de Presse Congolaise (UNPC), and Journalistes en Danger.

The EU encourages and supports efforts made by all sections of the media and government to ensure freedom of expression and prevent persecution of journalists.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia^{*}, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.