

Human Rights Council – 42<sup>nd</sup> session;

Interactive Dialogue on the Democratic Republic of the Congo

25 September 2019

### Australian Statement

Australia thanks the OHCHR for its update on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and notes concerns detailed in the report.

We welcome efforts to open up democratic space in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, demonstrated by the release of political prisoners, the holding of demonstrations without incident, the reopening of media outlets, and the reported decrease in human rights violations. Continued attacks against civil society actors, however, make clear that further efforts are required to enshrine civil liberties in the country's political culture.

In the context of ongoing conflict in the east of the country, we urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take all reasonable measures to safeguard civilians. In particular, Australia is concerned by the increase in sexual and gender-based violence, as well as widespread reports of children being coerced into participating in armed hostilities and otherwise falling victim to the conflict.

Australia commends the progress to date in combating impunity, apparent from the prosecution of senior military officials and armed group commanders for serious offences, including sexual and gender-based violence. We note the high proportion of state officials implicated in such crimes, and call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to bring these perpetrators to justice.

We ask what actions are being taken to advance bills under consideration relating to the enjoyment of human rights and the protection of human rights defenders?

**236 Words**