Foreword

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) recognises itself as "a State governed by the rule of law, independent, sovereign, united and indivisible, social, democratic and secular" (see. art. 1 paragraph 1 of the Constitution of 18 February 2006). Following on from the first attribute, namely the rule of law, the second in the series of seminars on the rule of law in the DRC organised in *Kikwit* focused on the sovereign and secular nature of the State.

Indeed, the political history of the DRC shows that the process of democratisation in this country has been influenced by certain external forces and above all, by civil society in all its diversity. This influence manifests itself particularly in the run-up to elections and more often than not, involves the participation of civil society actors with regard to the process of appointing the officials of the body responsible for organising elections, as well as exerting pressure to ensure that the electoral calendar and election results are adhered to.

But what does civil society mean in the context of the Congo? Is it an essential link in the organisation of the State or simply a structure designed to serve as a springboard for its leaders to gain access to political office? Do the internal management and operation of civil society organisations reflect the values and principles that these organisations themselves demand of the public authorities? What role do religious organisations, as part of civil society, play in consolidating the rule of law in the DRC? What would be the basis for their interventions in the political sphere in a State whose Constitution proclaims secularism? How has the emergence of so-called citizens' movements such as *LUCHA, Filimbi, Les Congolais debout*, etc. affected civil society in its fight for legitimate democratic changeover in the DRC? What is the level of citizen participation in the management of public affairs, particularly in decentralised territorial authorities? Does the requirement to pay a deposit in elections constitute discrimination based on the social status of candidates?

These are the main questions addressed by the various participants in this second seminar. The outcomes of these discussions are published in this edition of the African Law Study Library.

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