

Hundreds of Congo magistrates on indefinite strike over pay

KINSHASA: Several hundred magistrates in the Democratic Republic of Congo began an "indefinite" strike over pay on Monday, 3 November.



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"We have declared an indefinite strike across the whole territory so that the government respects its promises," said Shabani Watenda, a magistrate in the capital Kinshasa.

"In 2011, the head of state himself said that the lowest magistrate should earn \$1,600. Up to now, we have never seen this money," he said, adding that the lowest-ranked magistrates currently earn around 600,000 francs (\$650, €500) and lack other benefits such as health insurance.

President Joseph Kabila claimed during an election campaign in September 2011 that magistrate pay had increased from "\$724 in 2008 to \$1,600 in 2011".

"No one will work until we receive this money. We will organise picket lines. No magistrate will be able to reach his office," said Watenda.

In September of this year, the magistrates' union Synamac, which represents around half of the 3,500 magistrates in DRC, went on strike for around 10 days until the government promised to improve salaries.

Synamac said it understood the frustrations of the strikers but that it was unrealistic to demand pay raises without checking whether the government budget could meet their demands.

"We agree on the fundamental idea, but not the tactics," Synamac president Nsambayi Mutenda told AFP.

But the Congolese Association for Access to Justice said magistrates were being deliberately kept down by the

government.

"We strongly condemn the politics of pauperisation and militarisation of magistrates carried out by the Congolese government with the aim of keeping the judiciary in a state of dependence," said its president, Georges Kapiamba.

The DRC's judiciary is regularly criticised by local and international observers for political interference and lack of resources.

Source: AFP

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