

Colonial Impunity on Trial: The Patrice Lumumba Case and the Quest for Justice for African Independence Leaders

Background

On 17 March 2026, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the Brussels Court of First Instance decided to refer Étienne Davignon to the criminal court in connection with the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, alongside Joseph Okito (President of the Senate) and Maurice Mpolo (Minister of Youth and Sports). This decision follows more than fifteen years of legal efforts led by the children and grandchildren of Patrice Lumumba in their pursuit of justice.

Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was executed in Katanga on 17 January 1961, a few months after the country's independence from Belgium in June 1960. Following political tensions and international interferences, Lumumba was arrested, detained, and transferred to the secessionist province of Katanga, where he was assassinated alongside his companions.

For the first time in over six decades, individual criminal responsibility for this assassination may be examined before a court of law. This historic development challenges long-standing assumptions that colonial crimes cannot be prosecuted and signals a potential shift in addressing impunity for political crimes linked to colonization.

More than 60 years after his assassination, the Lumumba case remains of profound relevance not only for the Democratic Republic of Congo, but for broader discussions on justice, accountability, and the legacy of colonial violence across Africa. The targeted elimination of political leaders during and after independence has had lasting consequences on governance, stability, and development across the continent.

About the Event

Organized in the framework of the **UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent**, this in-person side event seeks to bring the Lumumba case into an international space of discussion.

While the case has primarily unfolded within the Belgian political and judicial sphere, its implications extend far beyond national borders. By situating the Lumumba case within broader debates on political colonial crimes, accountability, and reparations, the event aims to contribute to its internationalization and to strengthen global engagement around the pursuit of justice.

The discussion will bring together members of the Lumumba family, legal representatives, international experts, and civil society actors to explore both the legal and political dimensions of this historic case.

Speakers

Panel discussion (120 min) followed by Q&A:

- **Yema Lumumba**, Granddaughter of Patrice Lumumba
- **Jehosheba Bennett**, Legal counsel to the Lumumba family (Jus Cogens)
- **Makmid Kamara**, Founder & Director, Reforms Initiative
- **Dr. Ibrahima Guissé**, Expert, UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) & African Union Committee of Experts on Reparations (AUCER)
- **Geneviève Kaninda**, Advocacy & Policy Officer, African Futures Lab (Moderator)

Practical Info

Date: 15 April 2026

Time: 6.30PM - 20.30 CEST

Location: [The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights](#) - Rue de Lausanne 120B, Geneva

Link to register (mandatory) : <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/Q7VWkkMx4p>