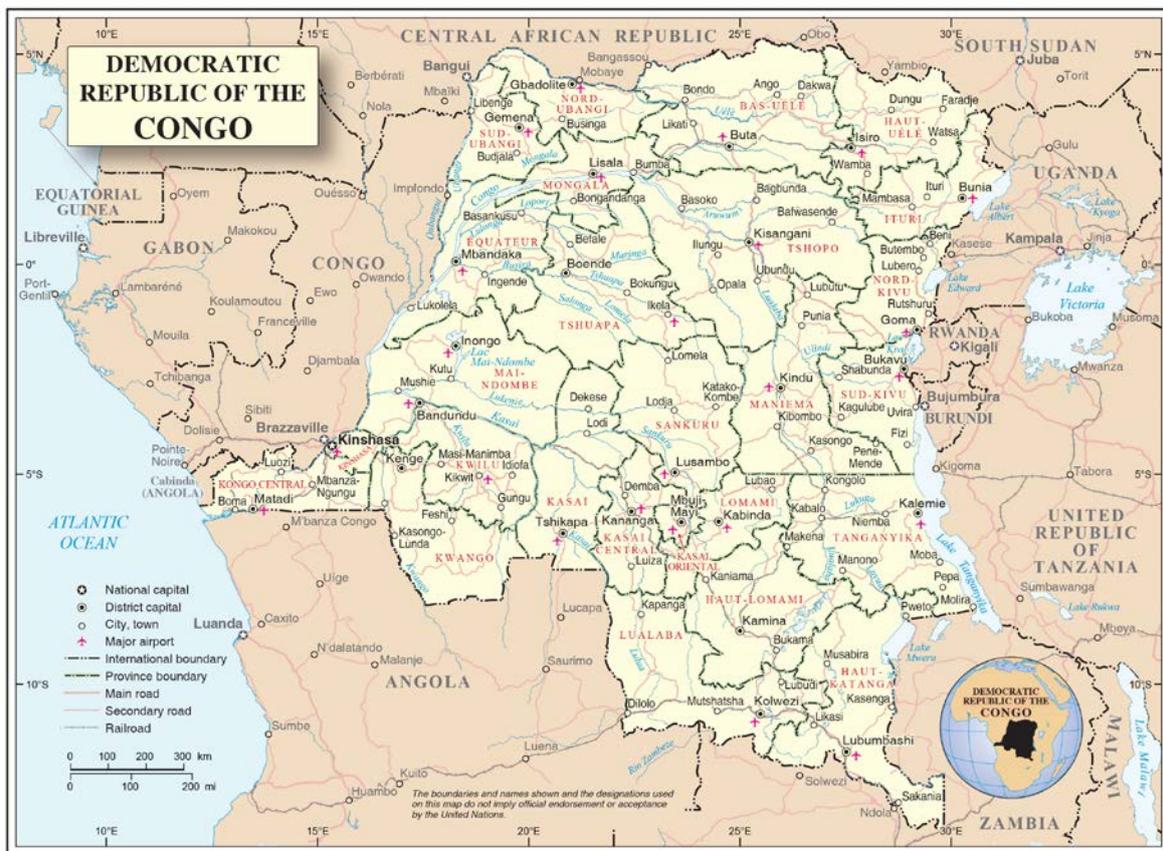


DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



L'OSSERVATORIO
 Associazione Nazionale
 Vittime Civili di Guerra
 ONUS
 RESEARCH CENTRE
 ON CIVILIAN VICTIMS
 OF CONFLICTS



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Celebrations for the 55th anniversary of Independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Credit: CC BY-SA, MONUSCO/ Abel Kavanagh

Source: Flickr.com

THE COUNTRY AT A GLANCE

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is richly endowed with immense natural resources, and mired in tensions and conflicts that date back decades ago. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) gained independence from Belgium in 1960, but its first six years as independent country were marked by violence and political crisis causing the death of some 100,000 people. The newly found independence brought a short democratic parenthesis terminated in a military coup, the “kleptocracy” of General Joseph Mobutu, and the rule of the Kabila family after the First Congo War with support from Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. During the Kabila presidency, the country experienced continuing tensions and violence, due to the deteriorating economic conditions, and the persistent violence fueled also by Kabila’s former Eastern allies, disappointed at his lack of cooperation. It has been calculated, that in 15 years DRC was torn by armies from nine nations, spawning at least 20 rebel groups that fought between 40/50 interlocking wars within wars.¹ Although recent studies identified the total number of civilian casualties to be around 200’000, some reports affirm the figures to be as high as 5 million.² In recent years, the DRC managed to regain some stability, although humanitarian needs are still high in the conflict-affected regions of North Kivu, South Kivu, Katanga, and Orientale Province, where there is large-scale, repeated displacement. IDPs, host populations, and those unable to flee are all vulnerable, as insecurity poses multiple protection risks and prevents access to basic services. The elections planned for 2016 are characterized by incertitude and delays, and generate tensions and concerns fueled by the possibility that President Joseph Kabila, barred by the Constitution to run for a third mandate, will refuse to step down.

¹ Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War in Africa*, PublicAffairs;

² International Rescue Committee, 2008 Report.

FLAG



NAME	République démocratique du Congo (French) Republíki ya Kongó Demokratíki (Lingala) Jamhuri ya Kidemokrasia ya Kongo (Swahili)
CAPITAL	Kinshasa
OFFICIAL AND VERNACULAR LANGUAGE	French Lingala Kikongo Swahili Tshiluba
POPULATION	78 million
ETHNIC GROUPS	Baya Banda Mandjia Sara Fulani Mboum M'Baka Yakoma Others
NEIGHBOURS	Republic of the Congo Central African Republic South Sudan Uganda Rwanda Burundi Tanzania Zambia Angola
TOTAL OF CIVILIANS AFFECTED (2016)	8,2 million
GDP	USD 29,7 billion
PEOPLE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE (2015)	7 million
LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH	50 years
DRC REFUGEES	516,770
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX	0.43 (175/188)
IDPS	1,756,585
GLOBAL PEACE INDEX	3.11 (152/163)
CORRUPTION PERCEPTION RANKING	147/168

INTRODUCTION

Geopolitical context

The DRC is gifted with limitless water, a fertile soil and a benign climate, and immense deposits of copper, gold, diamonds, cobalt, uranium, coltan and oil. The potential wealth of the country also represents one of its sources of instability, as internal and international actors always sought to increase their access to the resources of the country. Even today, at least 40 armed groups are operating just in the east of the country,³ in a variety of local militias, secessionist groups, and forces initially set up by fighters from Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. In particular, Rwanda and Uganda have played a major role in many DRC crisis, trying to increase their influence in the country through territorial control by proxies such as the now disbanded M23. Some other African states, such as Sud Africa, Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe also were involved in the DRC situation, although mainly as mediators or supporters of the government. The UN has a peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) inclusive of an intervention brigade for the implementation of its Protection of Civilians mandate, and an EU mission providing assistance to security sector reform is in the country since 2005. Efforts to demobilize armed groups are ongoing, with moderate results.

Peacekeeping missions: MONUC (1999 - 2010); MONUSCO (since 2010).

Main UN documents on DRC

- **Resolution of the Security Council extending the mandate of MONUSCO until 31 March 2017 [S/RES/2277]**, 30 March 2016
- **Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [S/2016/579]**, 28 June 2016
- **Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region [S/2016/232]**, 9 March 2016
- **Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation in the DRC covering period from June 2014 to May 2015 [A/HRC/30/32]**, 27 July 2015
- **Human Rights Council resolution on technical assistance and capacity-building for human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [A/HRC/27/L.32]**, 26 September 2014
- **Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [S/2014/453]**, 30 June 2014

³ ECHO, 13/08/2015

The genesis of the conflict

In 1996, a rebel army led by Laurent Kabila from eastern Congo marched a thousand miles until the capital, overthrowing Mobutu in what is called the First Congo War. During his march, Kabila's troops killed tens of thousands of refugees and IDPs with support from Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, reaffirmed the independence of the country and expelled his former allies with the support of Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. However the country, with its army dispersed and under pressure for a straining economy and under constant threat by several proxies influenced by eastern neighbors, quickly spiraled out of control. Political violence and inter-communal strife have persisted for decades, while operations by DRC armed forces and UN peacekeepers and infighting between armed groups disrupted security and stability. It has been calculated, that in 15 years DRC was torn by armies from nine nations, spawning at least 20 rebel groups that fought between 40/50 interlocking wars within wars in a country as big as Western Europe.

Peace talks and agreements

The first peace document on the situation in the DRC is the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement signed on July 1999 by representatives of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe and witnessed by representatives from Zambia, the Organization for African Unity, the United Nations and the Southern African Development Community. The Movement for the Liberation of the Congo, and the Congolese Rally for Democracy also signed the agreement. This document has been followed by other agreements, such as the 2002 Pretoria Accord on transition, the 2003 Sun City Agreement, and the later 2009 Goma Peace Agreement. One of the most important documents is, however, the 2002 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which created the framework for the truth commission to establish the truth among conflicting versions of history and to promote peace, reparation, and reconciliation. At international level, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement ("Framework Agreement") for the DRC and the region, signed by 11 countries in the Great Lakes, adopted the same focus in fighting impunity. Always in 2002, the Government of the DRC signed two separate Peace Agreements with the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and the Republic of Uganda, for the withdrawal of their respective troops from the territory of the DRC and the dismantling of other hostile forces.

THE VOICE OF THE VICTIMS – STORIES

One early morning in November 2012, Olivier, who had just turned 12 years old, was abducted swiftly, without a noise, by armed men while working in the family's field. Olivier went on to spend two years as a Mayi-Mayi child soldier in DRC's Katanga province. The captors belonged to the Mayi-Mayi Bakata Katanga armed group, a notorious group that has used terror tactics, abducted people and looted villages in northern Katanga over the last 5 years. The group abducted dozens of other children, including girls, on that same day. "Life in the forest was not easy. You had to be strong and have a goal in mind to survive," said Olivier. "...We slept on the ground. We had to loot villages to eat. We were drugged to remain obedient. We were forced to kill. When I was in the armed group, I committed violence and crimes, I lost my childhood, my friends and my mother."

One morning while the soldiers of the Congolese army were patrolling the area, Oliver managed to run up to them, and tell them he had been kidnapped. They enabled him to escape. He will be placed in a transit center in Lubumbashi, Katanga's capital, far from Pweto, where he has been active. "I had to learn to change the way I see the world. I had to re-learn to respect my neighbors, to share. I had to learn a trade, to read and write. I feel safe here. After years in the bush, I finally feel at home in the house, even if it is not my real family." Olivier is in the process of being reunified with his family. Now 15 years old, he dreams of becoming a journalist.⁴

Gilbert, 54 years, a church leader from Banda, in the Orientale province, had his son Gaspard kidnapped at young age by an armed group. "Gaspard was only 10 years old when armed men snatched him from us and took him into the bush. For two years, my wife and I were in utter misery." Gaspard's return home in 2012 brought great joy to the family, but this joy was fleeting: the little boy was behaving very strangely. He was completely different. Even the neighbors and his friends began avoiding him. Thinking about the state his son was in, made Gilbert's life unbearable." In 2012, Gaspard was selected for a mental health and psychosocial support programme involving theatre productions exploring various trauma-related themes. "This play has helped me to understand Gaspard's behavior better. The neighbors have also changed their attitude towards him: they're now happy for him to play with their kids."⁵

THE VOICE OF THE VICTIMS – VIDEOS

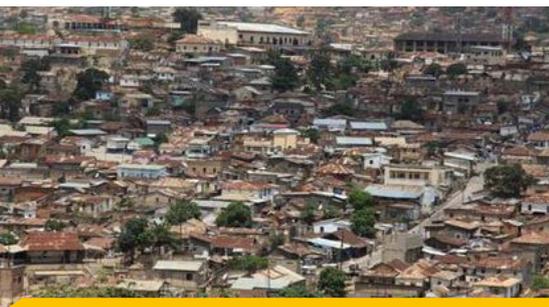
Teenage victim in Democratic Republic of Congo relives horror attack and the love she has for her son, <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/kill-instead-raping-her-teenage-5177107>

HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

Estimates for 2016 forecast an increase of people affected by the conflict from 7 to 7.5 million by four main types of humanitarian crises: violence and armed conflict, epidemics, malnutrition, and (on a lesser scale) natural disasters. The augmentation would mainly be due to the tensions related to the electoral period, but the interaction of these macro causes are also amplified by other cross cutting factors, such as the presence of a high numbers of IDPs. Apart from the humanitarian elements, the situation in the DRC presents some common causes undermining the full recovery and stability of the RDC, such as the weakness of the state authority, the decadent state of most infrastructures, and the widespread poverty. The continuous sequence of crises on such a fragile institutional setup, makes that each peak is perceived as just a phase in a unique, long humanitarian situation, instead of a separate event demanding specific answers.

⁴ Story credit to OCHA, "I was a child soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo", <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/i-was-child-soldier-democratic-republic-congo>

⁵ Story credit to International Committee of the Red Cross, Democratic Republic of the Congo: "Healing memories" through drama, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/dr-congo-healing-memories-through-drama>



Aerial view of the city of Matadi
Credit: CC BY, MONUSCO/ Myriam Asmani
Source: Flickr.com

Shelter

In 2015, the destruction of homes and shelters, as well as the looting of household items have affected over 1.9 million people, a number that is estimated to increase up to 3 million in 2016. Despite the neglect of the housing sector during the past thirty years, still until 2013, 85% of the population was a homeowner, but the recent political and economical crises have heavily impacted on the situation. The massive urban influx that began after independence led in fact to a fourfold increase in the population of Kinshasa, creating a massive housing problem that is still far from solved. At last estimate, more than half of housing units were traditional one-room adobe, straw, or mud structures, and less than half were modern houses of durable or semi-durable material containing one or more rooms. In rural areas houses are mostly made with traditional methods and local materials, and some ethnic groups (such as pygmies, and some Luba) are still living in tree trunk peel made shelters.



A woman in a breastfeeding center
Credit: CC, Unicef
Source: Unicef

Health

In 2016, 7,7 million of people in the country are estimated to be in need of basic health assistance. In fact, RDC has been ravaged not only by armed conflict, but also by epidemics, such as cholera, malaria, measles, and hemorrhagic fever. This is mostly due to the insufficient - sometimes almost nonexistent - public health system in most rural parts of the country, where prevention programs are patchy, irregular and often poorly implemented. While malaria, although endemic, remains the first cause of mortality, cholera and measles are accountable for the most intense crisis, with 15'591 suspect cases for cholera, and 30'223 for measles only between January and September 2014, with a mortality rate of 1,68% and 1,12% respectively. The intensity of these phenomena is often amplified by the dire access conditions to the most affected populations, impairing the intervention of health services and humanitarian actors. Another grave concern is the medical evacuation system, which is inefficient in the best cases. Rural communities have to rely on private transport, often represented by privately owned motorbikes, to evacuate through hours-long trips on muddied trails, wounded persons and pregnant women in need of hospitalization.



Congo refugees in Uganda at a water distribution point

*Credit: CC BY-ND, EU/ECHO/Martin Karimi
Source: Flickr.com*

Water and sanitation

Only 22% of the population in the DRC has daily access to clean drinking water, and sanitation is also out of the reach of most people. This situation has a clear negative impact on the living conditions of a population already vulnerable because of the conflict and the dire economic situation, increasing the possibility, frequency and impact of epidemics.



A woman carrying bananas

*Credit: CC BY-SA 2.5, Jay Dedman
Source: Wikimedia Commons*

Food security

According to the latest estimates, 6.6 million people are facing crisis or emergency food security levels as a result of armed group activity, inter-communal violence, and displacement. The regions in Emergency phase are Ituri (Orientale), Boende (Equateur), Punia (Maniema), Shabunda (South Kivu), Manono, Mitwaba, and Pweto (Katanga). The high levels of malnutrition also constitute a persistent reason for concern, considering that the mortality of the children dying before reaching five years (representing 10% of the total) includes for at least 50%, cases of death linked to this problem. In some areas, the overall rate for acute malnutrition is over 15%, against the national average which is between 11% and 15%. At national level, regions with an acute malnutrition rate over 11%, and severe malnutrition over 2%, are considered priority areas, and are not necessarily those affected by the conflict or heavy displacement.



Classrooms in Lusakela

*Credit: CC, Ken Wiegand, USAID
Source: <http://www.public-domain-image.com>*

Education

Around 7.3 million children aged 5-17, which represents 28% of the school-aged population, are not attending school. While the reasons are often linked to the lack of access to education services, in South Kivu, Katanga, and Orientale the causes preventing access to education are mostly related to violence. According to data for 2016, around 2 million children risk dropping out of school or not being enrolled during next year.



MONUSCO Conducts Joint Operation with Congolese Forces in Beni region

*Credit: CC BY-NC-ND, UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti
Source: Flickr.com*

Protection

Military, militias, and armed groups in general are accused of a variety of abuses and violations against civilians, including arbitrary arrest, extortion, looting, child conscription, sexual violence, and executions. The most affected regions remain the Kivu, Orientale Province, and Katanga, where repeated violations result in regular mass displacements further degrading the living conditions of the civilians. Ex-FDLR militants living in the state-administered camp accuse the DRC government of starving them so that they return to Rwanda, in breach of the principle of non-refoulement. MONUSCO has also announced it will stop providing food to 7,000 ex-fighters from September 2015 because of the lack of funding, sparking fears of renewed clashes. According to latest evaluations, around 5.3 million people are in need of some form of humanitarian protection.



People fleeing their villages due to fighting between FARDC and rebels groups, North Kivu, 2012

*Credit: CC BY-SA 2.0, MONUSCO/Sylvain Liechti
Source: Wikimedia Commons*

Access

Since it gained the independence, the DRC has seen a progressive deterioration of its transport infrastructures, with very limited roads in good conditions and a hardly reliable air transport system. In addition, in most parts of the country the access conditions worsens during the rainy season when in the most isolated areas access is only possible by motorbike or by feet, affecting heavily the eventual delivery of humanitarian assistance. Insecurity due to splintered armed groups, criminality and lack of discipline among some armed actors is also a major constraint for humanitarian access, especially in the east.

TRUTH SEEKING PROCESSES

The biggest effort in the field of truth seeking is the DRC Mapping Exercise Report (also called the Democratic Republic of the Congo 1993-2003 UN Mapping Report), a report realized by the United Nations which took place between March 1993 and June 2003. The exercise mapped the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, committed within the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The exercise also assessed the capacity of the national justice system to respond to such violations and to assist the government in identifying appropriate transitional justice mechanisms. The report, that included contribution by Congolese and international human rights experts, was submitted to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2009. In 2003, The DRC established a truth and reconciliation commission as set out in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in December 2002, which created the framework for the truth commission as one of five institutions “supporting the democracy”. Article 155 of the Transitional Constitution requires the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to “promote consolidation of the national unity”. In particular, the commission examined the political, economic, and societal conflicts between the country’s independence in 1960 and 2003. Consistent controversy

and a lack of credibility affected the perception and reputation of the Commission. In particular, critics underlined the far-from-excellent commissioners' competence and human rights record. This resulted in very limited implementation of the commission's mandate, and to the call by some for a follow-up truth-seeking mechanism.

MEMORY

Some organization have developed innovative programs to use memory for individual and collective healing. For example, since 2012, volunteers from the Red Cross Society of the DRC, religious leaders and teachers have been putting on popular theatre productions exploring various trauma-related themes. The plays cover a range of themes, including victims' experiences, their return home, stigmatization, helpful attitudes in the community, and counselling. The aim is to change people's attitudes towards survivors of the violence.



The Boulevard du 30 Juin in downtown Kinshasa, renamed to celebrate Congo's independence from Belgium
Credit: CC BY-SA 2.0, MONUSCO/Myriam Asmani
Source: Wikimedia Commons

FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY AND REPARATION

All the peace documents signed between 2002 and 2009 prohibited amnesty for serious crimes and promised prosecution of those responsible for these crimes. Through the Kampala Dialogue and the 2013 Nairobi Declaration, the Government reaffirmed its determination to end impunity and ensure prosecution of international crimes. The truth and reconciliation commission as set out in the 2002 Comprehensive Peace Agreement was, for example, also expected to contribute to the compensation of victims. An important step has been taken in 2012 by the Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in its Decision establishing the principles and procedures to be applied to reparations affirming the victims' fundamental right to reparations (ICC-01/04-01/06). At international level, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its Case concerning armed activities on the territory of the Congo⁶ required Uganda to pay reparations for human rights violations committed by Ugandan forces in the DRC.

⁶ Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda), Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2005,p.168

PEACEBUILDING

The DRC has been the testing ground for countless peacebuilding projects and activities, due to the sporadic nature of tensions and violence, the stable presence of international institutions, and the solidity of Congolese civil society. Some of the most relevant activities have been realized between November 2008 and August 2015 with the support of the ICC Trust Fund for Victims, through implementation by local and international NGOs such as CAF Beni, AMAB, COOPI, ALT, Missionaries d'Afriques. Activities covered include psychological rehabilitation and socio-economic support through peace and reconciliation activities focusing on children victims of violence or associated with armed forces, child mothers, victims of sexual violence, civilians mutilated, and community members.



A peacebuilding project promoted by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education to celebrate the International Day of Peace on September 21st 2014

Credit: CC, Unicef

Source: Unicef



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