



# Africa Policy Brief

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## Post-Election Congo:

### In conversation with Dr Peter Kagwanja

***External partners are still needed in post-election DRC to assist in the country's recovery from the devastating civil war. However, the greatest threat to peace remains competition for the DRC's vast natural resources.***

African neighbours and outside powers, for once, backed to the hilt the delicate transition process and the historic multi-party elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This culminated in the installation on 6 December 2006 of Joseph Kabila as the first democratically elected leader of the country in over 40 years. Despite this, politics in post-election DRC is still brittle.

External partners must remain engaged in the peace-building process to avert the risk of the DRC relapsing into war. The role of external partners in post-election Congo was the subject of a high-level round-table meeting in Pretoria on 30 January 2007. With the theme, 'Post-Election Republic of Congo: Towards Partnerships for Post- Conflict Reconstruction and Development', the meeting was convened by the Democracy and Governance programme of the Human Sciences Research Council in collaboration with the Policy Research and Analysis Unit of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs.

Paradoxically, the role of outside powers and African states in the DRC since independence from Belgium in 1960 has both a silver lining and a sinister ring to it. In his widely read book, *The Murder of Lumumba* (2001), the Belgian historian Ludo de Witte documents the connivance of external powers and segments of the Congolese elite in the cruel assassination of Congo's first elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, in January 1961. Western powers blessed and bankrolled Mobutu Sese Seko's kleptocracy for 32 years.

Congo's African neighbours took the plunge after the West (Belgium, Britain, France and the United States) left the stage when anti-Mobutu rebels invaded in October 1996. Nigeria's bid to reconcile Mobutu and rebel leader Laurent Kabila backfired. Nelson Mandela's mediation on board the battleship *Outeniqua* also fell through. Kabila, backed by Rwanda and Uganda, swept to power in Kinshasa in May 1997.

Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe joined the fray in 1998, sending in troops to answer Kabila's cry for help in heading off a rebel invasion propped up by his erstwhile allies, Rwanda and Uganda. This triggered what has been dubbed 'Africa's First World War', as part of Congo's 1998–2003 civil war, which killed nearly 4 million people.

The Global and Inclusive Agreement on transition in the DRC, hammered out in Pretoria in 2002, paved the way for the withdrawal of foreign troops and the installation of a government of national unity. The transitional arrangement was a spectacular balancing of local power relations.

President Joseph Kabila agreed to a power-sharing deal with four of his opponents serving as vice-presidents.

After 1999, the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC (MONUC) became the public face of the international partnership for Congo's transition. With 17 500 troops and an annual budget of just over \$1 billion, MONUC is by far the largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world. Nevertheless, MONUC is still too small to pacify a country of 2.345 million km<sup>2</sup> (the size of Western Europe).

The Kinshasa-based International Committee for Supporting the Transition (CIAT) emerged as a broad-based partnership that kept the transition on an even keel. Support for the transition also came from the EU, which contributed some €33 million towards training a 38 000-strong police force in 2005–06. The EU also deployed 400–450 soldiers in Kinshasa (with 800–1 000 on the standby in nearby Gabon) to secure the 2006 elections.

In 2004, the United States created the Joint Verification Commission (JVC) and a Tripartite Commission to enhance co-operation in intelligence gathering between Congolese, Burundian, Rwandan and Ugandan armies in order to defuse tensions.

On the African front, apart from its role as mediator, South Africa deployed 1 268 troops in the DRC. In January 2004, Pretoria and the DRC signed a Joint Bilateral Commission (JBC) worth \$10 billion. The agreement facilitated the training of some 300 police officers at a price tag of \$5 million and (together with Belgium) the training of the Third Brigade of the Congolese national army. A difficult issue, however, is the potential impact of corporate South Africa on Congo's reconstruction.

Similarly, Angola trained 3 800 police officers, 80 members of an anti-crime brigade and 40 police trainers. It also trained Congo's Second Integrated Brigade and a battalion of commando troops at a total cost of \$50 million.

Lasting peace and democracy in the DRC remains a work in progress. Ironically, while expanding democratic space, the electoral process has also opened up new fault lines of insecurity. The fierce battle for the presidency between Joseph Kabila and Jean-Pierre Bemba has polarised politics into pro-Kabila 'Swahiliphone' and pro-Bemba 'Lingalaphone' zones, with far-reaching implications for citizenship.

Flare-ups of violence have dimmed the post-election rays of optimism significantly. Clashes after the gubernatorial elections in January 2007 killed some 77 people in the Bas Congo province. Pockets of fighting linger on in the eastern regions of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu.

Largely ill-trained and underpaid troops of the national army (FARDC), accused of plunder, brutality and rape, remain a serious threat to peace. Also posing a serious security risk is the presence of some 80 000–90 000 Rwandese and Ugandan rebels in the DRC. Some 1.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 430 625 refugees must be resettled, and 204 341 refugees within Congo must be fed and sheltered. Landmines are hampering economic activity, with 285 people killed by mines during 2003–04.

High-level corruption is still endemic. A July 2005 report by a UN panel stated that 60–80 per cent of customs revenue was embezzled. The DRC ranked 156 in Transparency International's 2006 list of the most corrupt countries. Reversing corruption and ensuring public accountability demands the strengthening of the judicial system. In mid-February, the UN Security Council extended MONUC's mandate until 15 April 2007. MONUC must now clarify its exit strategy and timetable while radically redefining its role in post-election Congo to focus on such urgent issues as the training of the national army, the disarming of armed combatants, and the resettling of the displaced.

The expiry of CIAT's mandate after the election has created a vacuum. An alternative body is urgently required to mediate post election conflicts. The EU is perhaps one of the most important partners in Congo's reconstruction, with its Strategy for Africa (2005) assisting the continent to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The strategy should have peace-building in the DRC as a central strand.

Finally, the African Union adopted its post-reconstruction strategy in July 2006. The body must now step up its campaign to mobilise resources to rebuild countries emerging from war like the DRC.

When all is said and done, the ultimate risk to stability in the DRC is the competing economic interests of various actors. If not channeled properly, these partisan interests could plunge the country back into chaos and anarchy.

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