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FROM ZAIRE TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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*The opinions expressed in this volume are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.*

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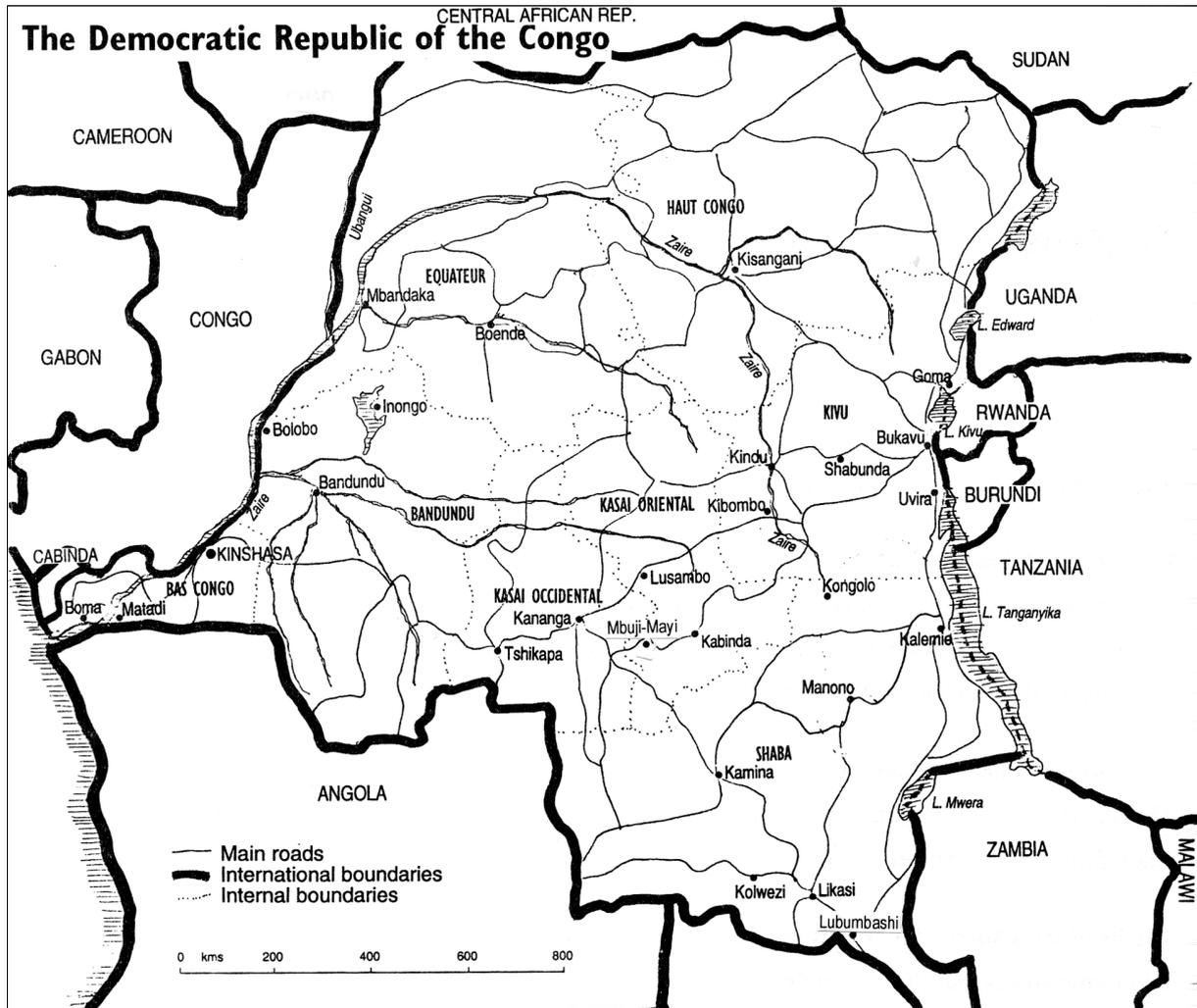
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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	5
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT .....	7
The Legacy of Authoritarianism .....	7
The Impact of the National Conference .....	8
The Informalisation of the Economy .....	11
FROM MOBUTU SESE SEKO TO LAURENT-DÉSIRÉ KABILA .....	13
The Seven-Month War to Overthrow the Mobutu Regime .....	13
A New Dictator for the Congo .....	14
The War for Congo's Natural Resources .....	15
THE NEED FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION .....	18
Managing the Political Transition .....	18
Economic and Social Reconstruction .....	19
Implications for the Great Lakes Region .....	21
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	23



*Area:* 2,345,410 sq km

*Population:* 58,317,930 (July 2004 est.)

*Age structure:* 0–14 years: 48.2%; 15–64 years: 49.3%; 65 years and over: 2.5% (2004 est.)

*Population growth rate:* 2.99% (2004 est.)

*Birth rate:* 44.73 births/1,000 population (2004 est.)

*Death rate:* 14.64 deaths/1,000 population (2004 est.)

*Infant mortality rate:* 94.69 deaths/1,000 live births (2004 est.)

*Religions:* Roman Catholic 50%, Protestant 20%, Kimbanguist 10%, Muslim 10%, other syncretic sects and indigenous beliefs 10%

*Languages:* French (official), Lingala, Kingwana, Kikongo, Tshiluba

*Literacy:* total population: 65.5% (2003 est.)

*Independence:* 30 June 1960 (from Belgium)

*Chief of state:* President Joseph Kabila (since 26 January 2001); the president is both the chief of state and head of government

*GDP:* composition by sector: agriculture: 55%; industry: 11%; services: 34% (2000 est.)

*Labour force:* total: 14.51 million (1993 est.)

*Natural resources:* cobalt, copper, cadmium, petroleum, industrial and gem diamonds, gold, silver, zinc, manganese, tin, germanium, uranium, radium, bauxite, iron ore, coal, hydropower, timber

*Industries:* mining (diamonds, copper, zinc), mineral processing, consumer products (including textiles, footwear, cigarettes, processed foods and beverages), cement

*Agriculture products:* coffee, sugar, palm oil, rubber, tea, quinine, cassava, palm oil, bananas, root crops, corn, fruits, wood products

*Exports:* \$1.417 billion f.o.b. (2002 est.)  
commodities: diamonds, copper, crude oil, coffee, cobalt,  
partners: Belgium 55.6%, US 15.6%, Zimbabwe 11.2%, Finland 4.9% (2003 est.)

*Imports:* \$933 million f.o.b. (2002 est.)  
commodities: foodstuffs, mining and other machinery, transport equipment, fuels  
partners: South Africa 16.1%, Belgium 14.1%, France 11.9%, Nigeria 10.7%, Germany 6.5%, Kenya 5.1% (2003 est.)

Source: *World Factbook 2004*

## Introduction

On 4 August 1992, the overwhelming majority of the 2,842 delegates at the Congolese Sovereign National Conference in Kinshasa voted, by acclamation and standing ovation, to change the name of the country from “Zaire” back to its original name of “Congo”. They also adopted a Transitional Charter or provisional constitution, according to which then President Mobutu Sese Seko was stripped of his executive powers but allowed to remain in office for two years as a ceremonial head of state. The international community chose to follow Mobutu in not recognizing these decisions as sovereign and binding on all parties. It chose to ignore them.

Five years later, on 17 May 1997, Laurent-Désiré Kabila changed all of this by a stroke of the pen. Having taken over Kinshasa by the force of arms after seven months of a virtually unchallenged long march, Kabila proclaimed himself president of a country he renamed the “Democratic Republic of the Congo”, or DRC. This time, not only did the international community take notice of Mobutu’s ouster and the change in the country’s name, it moved quickly to recognize the new name and the new ruler. The message that the world community of nations sent to the people of the Congo and Africa as a whole in these two instances is loud and clear. Changes through democratic means and the rule of law in Africa are not as deserving of unequivocal support as changes through the barrel of a gun. The first changes are slow, somewhat confusing, and seem to rely on universal principles of democratic governance that some believe are not applicable to Africa. The second, on the other hand, are decisive and led by self-reliant African leaders who are likely to establish stable political orders and market economies compatible with the interests of the developed North.

The current political and social situation in the DRC cannot be understood without reference to the failure of the National Conference to end Mobutu’s rule and win international recognition, and Kabila’s success in doing so. By achieving these two goals, Kabila and his *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (AFDL) felt no need to form an inclusive government with

the democratic forces which dominated the National Conference. They were confident that they had all that was needed to bring about economic and social reconstruction without the active participation of all the relevant political and social forces of the country. As subsequent events were to show, they were wrong on this matter.

This paper examines the political and social situation in the DRC since May 1997, together with the prospects for a successful political and social transition. Consistent with the deepest aspirations of the Congolese population, such a transition will succeed if it involves an irreversible development towards multiparty democracy and the full utilisation of the country’s immense resources for economic and social development. In other words, a successful transition is one in which basic freedoms and liberties will be guaranteed through democratic governance and the rule of law, with tangible improvements in living conditions.

The paper is divided into three major parts. The first part examines the background to the present situation, with emphasis on the legacy of authoritarianism, the impact of the National Conference, and the importance of the informalisation of the economy as factors that helped undermine state authority and create a situation in which the people of the Congo once again lost the ability to determine their own destiny. The second part looks at the political situation between 1996 and 2003, which is marked by two wars, the seven-month war to overthrow the Mobutu regime under the sponsorship of neighbouring states, and the war for Congo’s resources initiated by Rwanda and Uganda in August 1998. Finally, the third part concludes the paper with a re-examination of the need for a successful transition to democracy and its implications for economic and social reconstruction at home, and for peace and security in the region.



# The Historical Context

## The Legacy of Authoritarianism

The past weighs heavily on the present in the Congo. The country entered contemporary history in 1885 as a personal possession of Leopold II, King of the Belgians. Jean Stengers, a Belgian historian, has written that to the king, the Congo Free State (CFS), as the country was then known, was just a going concern as Standard Oil was to John Rockefeller.<sup>1</sup> The key question was whether or not it was profitable. And to make it profitable, the king hired an international cast of adventurers as CFS agents. The latter used so much terror and violence to extract wealth from the country that they committed atrocities that Christian missionaries and humanitarian organisations such as Edmond Morel's Congo Reform Association (CRA) characterised as "crimes against humanity". The first person to use this expression with reference to Leopold's Congo was the African-American historian and journalist George Washington Williams, who travelled across the Congo in 1890.

With celebrities like the African-American leader Booker T. Washington and the writer Mark Twain leading the American branch of the CRA, the US government was compelled to join Britain and other major powers in obtaining King Leopold's ouster as Congo's ruler. But the king's transfer of the country to Belgium did not mean the end of suffering for the Congolese people. As the British historian Roger Anstey has shown in his book *King Leopold's Legacy*, Belgian colonialism did not, and could not, free itself from the legacy of the Free State.<sup>2</sup> The basic features of economic exploitation, political repression and cultural oppression remained essentially the same, albeit less brutal.

In 1956, a popular movement for democracy was born with the launching of the struggle for independence. This was a great national awakening,

with people from all walks of life ready to shed fear to manifest their permanent aspiration for freedom and their desire for a better life materially and a more secure future for their children. With independence in 1960, the Belgian Congo disappeared to give way to the DRC, amid great popular expectations that the immense resources of the country would now be utilised to improve the living conditions of ordinary men and women.

Unfortunately, independence and its aftermath did not fulfil these expectations. The country was plunged into a major crisis within two weeks of its independence, following the mutiny of the former colonial army and the secession of Katanga, its richest province. The Congo Crisis, as it was known, lasted four years and involved the up to then largest deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces. Two major world figures also lost their lives during the crisis: Patrice Lumumba, the Congo's independence leader and first elected prime minister, and Dag Hammarskjöld, then UN secretary-general. The first was assassinated on orders from US President Dwight D. Eisenhower and senior Belgian officials as part of the anti-Communist crusade during the Cold War, while the second died in a plane crash on a mission to find a solution to the Katanga secession.

The main beneficiary of the Congo Crisis and the man the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and policymakers identified as the strongman needed to rule the Congo was none other than Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, who later changed his forename to Sese Seko. A former sergeant in the colonial army, he was appointed chief of staff of the Congolese National Army in July 1960 by Prime Minister Lumumba. Having betrayed his mentor and served his foreign masters well, Mobutu finally took over as head of state in a military coup d'état in 1965. He soon became the Congo's new king, the successor to Leopold II as the rightful owner of the country and its abundant resources. The sense of ownership was so strong that Mobutu saw fit to change the country's name, unilaterally, from "Congo" to "Zaire" on 27 October 1971.

Mobutu put an end to the democratic experiment of the first five years of independence and

1. Jean Stengers, "La place de Léopold II dans l'histoire de la colonisation", *La Nouvelle Cléo*, IX (1950), p. 524, cited in Ruth Slade, *King Leopold's Congo: Aspects of Race Relations in the Congo Independent State* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1962), p. 176.

2. Roger Anstey, *King Leopold's Legacy: The Congo under Belgian Rule, 1908–1960* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1966).

established personal rule. His dictatorship was backed up by military force and a party-state system from which he recruited his cronies and retainers internally, and by the United States, France and Belgium, externally. When they were needed, the three external powers intervened militarily to save the dictator from armed insurgents seeking to overthrow him. In 1996–97, when that support did not materialise, Mobutu could no longer hang on to power. He was forced to flee the country. And he died in exile less than four months later, in September 1997.

The insurgency that brought about Mobutu's demise is directly related to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the defining moment of the current political situation in the Great Lakes region. Like the ethnic cleansing in the Katanga and Kivu provinces of Mobutu's Zaire, the Rwandan genocide was partly a result of the violent backlash of authoritarian regimes against the democracy movement. In the Rwanda case, the late President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, had been in power since 1973. During 20 years of personal rule, he steadfastly refused to allow Tutsi victims of the 1959 pogrom and subsequent violence, who were in exile in neighbouring countries, to return home. Under the leadership of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), the Tutsi diaspora in Uganda launched a military campaign to overthrow the Habyarimana regime in October 1990. France, Belgium and Mobutu's Zaire came to the dictator's rescue and prevented an RPF victory.

Under the auspices of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), negotiations over two years between Habyarimana's government and the RPF to end the civil war led to the signing of the Arusha accords in 1993. These included the Arusha Peace Agreement of 4 August 1993, a cease-fire agreement, and six Protocols on the rule of law, power-sharing, repatriation of refugees and resettlement of displaced persons, integration of armed forces and other issues. In spite of having signed these accords, President Habyarimana did his best to undermine them, and this played into the hands of Hutu extremists bent on exterminating the Tutsi.

The shooting down of Habyarimana's plane on 6 April 1994 gave these extremists the occasion they needed to unleash their genocidal machine against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu. France's supposedly humanitarian *Opération Turquoise* (June–

August 1994) helped this machine—which was made up of the defeated *Forces Armées Rwandaises* (FAR) and the *Interahamwe* militia—to escape with virtually all of the weapons at its disposal into the Congo and to regroup for future attacks on the newly established RPF regime in Rwanda. Mobutu's fall and Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rise to power in Kinshasa were direct consequences of the RPF drive to destroy the UNHCR refugee camps in Kivu, together with the support that the ex-FAR and the Hutu extremist militia were receiving from the Mobutu regime.

### The Impact of the National Conference

The current struggle for multiparty democracy in Congo-Kinshasa began in 1980 with a rebellion of 13 members of Parliament, including Etienne Tshisekedi wa Mulumba, who wrote a 52-page letter to Mobutu demanding political reforms. The 13 were immediately met by brutal repression. However, repeated jailing, suffering and the defection of some of the original members did not make the group abandon its opposition to the Mobutu regime. Their courage was such that they defied Mobutu's laws against opposition parties by creating one in 1982, the *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS). Thus, long before Mobutu was compelled by internal and external pressure to accept multipartyism in April 1990, the UDPS had become associated in people's minds with the democracy movement in the Congo.

In July 1991, as the Mobutu regime was making plans to set up a constitutional conference, the UDPS and other opposition parties insisted on the holding of a national conference. Following the example set earlier that year in Benin, national conferences had become popular in Africa as democratic forums of all the relevant social forces of a nation designed to take stock of what has gone wrong in the past and to chart a new course for the future. They were conceived as a combination of a truth and reconciliation commission and a constitutional commission to serve as both a forum for a national catharsis in the African tradition of conflict resolution through the palaver, and a modern rule of law mechanism for setting into motion a successful transition to democracy. They were also seen to be all the more critical in countries like Congo-Kinshasa, which lacked the minimum infrastruc-

ture for free and fair elections. The conference, whose decisions are meant to be binding on all parties or groups, was therefore the most appropriate forum from which a transitional government could emerge to prepare the way for multiparty elections and progress towards democracy.

In the Congo, the *Conférence Nationale Souveraine* (CNS) was the largest, with its 2,842 delegates, and the longest running in Africa. Opened on 7 August 1991, the CNS ended on 6 December 1992. In reality, the conference effectively met for a little over eight months, having been disrupted by political disputes, interrupted by politically-motivated violence and looting by soldiers in September and October 1991, and illegally suspended by Prime Minister Nguz a Karl I Bond on 19 January 1992.

On Sunday, 16 February 1992, the death squads of Mobutu's Israeli-trained Special Presidential Division (*Division Spéciale Présidentielle*, DSP) and the German- and Egyptian-trained *Garde Civile* opened fire on peaceful demonstrators in Kinshasa, who had been called upon by Roman Catholic priests and other religious groups to protest against the suspension of the conference. Over 30 people were killed, with bibles and candles in hand. They became "the martyrs of democracy", entitled to the same hero status as the martyrs of independence, who fell on Sunday, 4 January 1959 in Kinshasa, during the insurrection against Belgian rule.

The CNS resumed its work on 6 April 1992, following world-wide condemnations of the February massacre and pressures from both internal and external sources to reconvene the conference. It then proceeded in a very methodical way in organising itself to tackle the important tasks facing it. A whole month was devoted to determining who would sit as a delegate, with challenges over the credentials of controversial figures sometimes taking up an entire day. The following month and a half (May to mid-June) turned out to be a lot more pleasant, as the CNS and, through live television and radio coverage, the nation as a whole, listened to over one hundred general policy statements by political parties, civil society organisations, representatives of state institutions and distinguished citizens. These speeches were meant to provide the CNS with the raw materials needed for its central

task of taking stock of the past in order to chart a new course for the future.

Having sorted out the major themes from the speeches, the CNS divided itself into 23 commissions and over 100 sub-commissions, to study, investigate and debate the record of the past in order to make recommendations for the country's future. Every conceivable subject or aspect of our national life was dealt with by at least one commission or sub-commission. Subjects ranged from assassinations and ill-gotten property to economic policy, political structures and minority rights, including those of Pygmies and immigrants. Once completed, the report of each commission—itsself a synthesis of the reports by its sub-commissions—was distributed to each delegate and, with two exceptions, read by the commission's rapporteur general and debated in plenary sessions of the CNS. The exceptions concern the reports of the assassination and ill-gotten property commissions. They were not debated because the CNS President, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kisangani Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, had unilaterally decided to block their hearing to spare President Mobutu any further embarrassment.

Throughout the conference and afterwards, Monsignor Monsengwo made it clear by his acts that he was prepared to go to any length to be accommodating to Mobutu. For him, any compromise was necessary if it were the only way of getting the dictator to implicate himself in the democratisation process. This is why he went so far as to suspend the conference's hearing of commission reports in July 1992 for the purpose of conducting extra-CNS negotiations on the constitutional and institutional framework of the transition with Mobutu's representatives. That such negotiations were a violation of the CNS rules of procedure and an evident way of calling into question the conference's sovereignty did not seem to disturb the prelate.

Monsengwo was eventually successful in coaxing all the major components of the CNS, including the UDPS-led coalition of opposition parties, into negotiations over a power-sharing formula originally proposed by Herman Cohen, then US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Cohen himself went to Kinshasa at the end of the month to give a final push for this formula and to broker an agreement to this effect between the

three key political players of the moment: Mobutu, Monsengwo and Tshisekedi.

The agreement, known as "*le compromis politique global*" (or comprehensive political compromise), provided for a two-year transition under a government elected by the CNS and responsible to a provisional parliament, the High Council of the Republic, also elected by the CNS, and a ceremonial presidency that would be filled by the incumbent, President Mobutu. The compromise was presented to the CNS as a *fait accompli* on 3 August 1992, but it was broadly incorporated in the transitional charter adopted the next day. As well-informed political analysts, including this author, had predicted, Mobutu and his entourage were not prepared to give up the reins of political power and the economic advantages associated with it.

From 5 p.m. on Friday 14 to 5 a.m. on Saturday 15 August, the country witnessed the freest and most transparent election in the nation's history, at the People's Palace in Kinshasa. Tshisekedi was elected prime minister with 71 percent of the vote by CNS delegates, against 27 percent for the candidate of the Mobutu camp, Professor Thomas Kanza, who later served as minister in Laurent Kabila's government and as the Congo's ambassador to Sweden. Much of Kinshasa did not sleep that night. At dawn, hungry and exhausted CNS delegates were met by enthusiastic crowds of citizens, including children as young as six years old, who sang and danced in the streets of the capital in celebration of Tshisekedi's election. The victory was theirs, and "the people's prime minister", they hoped and expected, would implement radical change to improve their lives.

For all intents and purposes, the Tshisekedi government lasted three months only, from 30 August to 1 December 1992. This is the day Mobutu sent his troops to evict all ministers from their offices and ordered Tshisekedi, illegally, to form a government more acceptable to the dictator. Before this date, Mobutu and his entourage had done their best to undermine the transitional government by refusing to relinquish control over the central bank, the general tax office, customs, and all revenue generating state enterprises like mining companies and utilities.

As Tshisekedi resisted bending to Mobutu's will, the wily dictator made use of all his Machiavellian princely attributes as both lion and fox to

defeat the democratic forces. He used troops to retain control over the central bank and the tax office; provoked a mutiny and looting by soldiers in late January 1993; and used his access to millions of dollars in state revenue to divide the democracy movement and lure its weakest members to his camp. Mobutu's Zaire became the only country in the world where the head of state led the opposition to the legally established government, organised economic sabotage, and directed acts of terror and ethnic cleansing against his opponents and their supporters.

Thus, because of the many mistakes made by the democratic opposition, the duplicitous role of Monsignor Monsengwo, and Mobutu's violent backlash against the democracy movement, the CNS failed to achieve its short-term goal, which consisted of setting up a viable political transition. On the other hand, the long-term consequences of the national conference are basically positive with respect to political culture in the Congo. More than any other national conference in Africa, the CNS did a rather thorough job of examining the country's history, resources, institutions and governance, including economic policy and performance. Most of its 23 commissions produced solid and well-documented reports that should enrich our national archives. Moreover, since conference proceedings were broadcast live on national radio and television, this forum turned into a great educational experience for the nation as a whole. Our people are better informed about the country's realities, and a better educated citizenry is a good foundation for a stronger and more responsible civil society.

In sum, the national conference did mark a major watershed in Congolese history. It is and will remain a major historical reference in the political life of the nation. Although Mobutu retained power during and after the conference, he did so through military force, state-sponsored terrorism and economic sabotage. Aware that he ruled over unwilling subjects, he no longer cared to stay overnight in Kinshasa, the country's capital, preferring to remain at his hideaway palace at Kawele, near Gbadolite in the far north. For a country where Mobutu's pronouncements used to have the force of law, the rapid decline of his authority was nothing but phenomenal.

As Tshisekedi used to tell his followers, the power of a dictator resides in the people's fear of

him. Once that fear is gone and a culture of freedom begins to grow, there is greater support for the right to discuss public affairs freely and to criticise the government. Moreover, since the struggle for independence in the 1950s and the popular insurrections for a “second independence” in the 1960s, a culture of resistance against illegitimate state authority has remained a major feature of Congolese political life. The national conference served to revive and reinforce this culture, together with the people’s propensity to resist authoritarian and oppressive rule.

The legacy of the CNS can be summarised as consisting of the following features:

- The National Conference restored the democratic right of the people as the primary sovereign, and therefore the source of all state power and authority, and the sovereignty of the nation over the state;
- Consistent with this principle, the Transitional Charter affirmed the right and duty of citizens to resist dictatorship and authoritarianism, or to rise up against an illegitimate and oppressive government;
- The live coverage of CNS proceedings by state radio and television underscored the necessity of openness and transparency in national affairs, the need for a well-informed citizenry, and the right of people to discuss public issues and thus participate in the policy process;
- The inclusive nature of the CNS as the people in conference, reflecting all the social and political cleavages of the nation, reaffirmed the commitment to diversity and to political and trade union pluralism;
- The election of the prime minister by a secret ballot through an electoral process that was free, fair and transparent from beginning to end conferred a legitimacy on the individual who was so elected that none of the prime ministers subsequently named by Mobutu could ever hope to acquire; and
- National reconciliation and the transition from personal rule to the rule of law were to be accompanied by ending impunity, introducing transparency in public finances, creating a truly national army to replace Mobutu’s paramilitary forces, and strengthening state institutions to

enhance their capacity for national reconstruction and economic development.

This legacy remains the major achievement of the Sovereign National Conference, and it is the source of the latter’s legitimacy as a defining moment in the Congo’s history. In its clarity and comprehensiveness, it provides essential guidelines for the political future of the country. Thus, if the institutional framework that resulted from the CNS is no longer viable, being outdated and impossible to reconstruct in any meaningful way, the political legacy of the CNS is alive and well. It is this legacy that ought to be respected and utilised in redesigning the political transition in the DRC for purposes of rebuilding the state and enhancing its capacity to meet the people’s expectations with respect to freedom and material prosperity.

### **The Informalisation of the Economy**

Another contributing factor to the culture of resistance against state authority is the informal economy. Generally, people go into this sector of the economy not by choice, but by necessity. The failure of the state to play its classical role as a state, including carrying out routine tasks like records keeping, revenue collection and order maintenance, and paying the salaries of soldiers and civil servants, may lead to a generalised informalisation of the economy. In this context, regulative activities and the delivery of public services either are non-existent or obey a logic other than that of the rule of law. The collapse of the state machinery has important consequences for society, as people must count on their own efforts in order to make ends meet and to survive. Those who idealise the informal sector tend to overlook these realities.

The informalisation of the economy in the Congo was directly related to the privatisation and personalisation of the state by President Mobutu. As the country’s chief, he felt entitled to dispose of public property and funds as though they were his own. There were instances in which public officials would unexpectedly but pleasantly be surprised to learn that the president in his magnanimity had decided to cede to them as a gift the government villa in which they resided. Lives could be changed and the state impoverished with a stroke of the presidential pen. Thus, a large number of state proper-

ties were privatised, whose beneficiaries often proved how grateful they were by reciprocating with gifts of money and other resources to the president and his family. The notion of public property as something that rulers and civil servants were supposed to hold in trust for the people did not exist in Mobutu's political kingdom.

In this universe, where the state was both the major source of wealth and the means of preserving it, money was a major instrument of power. The enormous amount of money that political patrons and clients needed to ensure their survival, to make and keep friends as well as to neutralise their enemies, was mostly produced locally from the country's resources, including diamonds, gold, and electric power. Much of this money did not go into the state treasury. For example, it was estimated that a sum of \$40 to 60 million was generated each month from mining and petroleum revenues in 1996. Yet, by the end of July, the government of Prime Minister Léon Kengo wa Dondo claimed to have raised less than \$150 million for the 1996 budget exercise, two-thirds of which supposedly came from customs revenue. The question that inevitably arises is where the rest of the money went.

The funds unaccounted for do explain the incredible fact that this country of continental dimensions and so fabulously rich in natural resources had an annual government budget of around \$300 million in 1996, much less than that of a smaller country like Congo-Brazzaville, or even a medium size university in the United States. Actually, if past experience is a useful guide, it is evident that the government spent a lot more than what was budgeted. For example, total expenditure in 1992 and 1993 amounted to \$1,541 and \$1,001 million respectively, while the corresponding revenue was only \$265 and \$230 million, respectively! Instead of serving as the public policy instrument of choice, the budget was simply a fiction in the Mobutu-Kengo system.

What made the budget meaningless is that the whole functioning of the state was based, not on the rule of law, but on negotiations between different networks. Thus, even getting a small portion of the money allocated to a state institution or public service involved elaborate negotiations with the ministries of budget and finance, the central bank and the disbursing agents in the central bank. Unable to play its regulatory role and basically bank-

rupt since 1994, the central bank could only observe the breakdown of the banking system throughout the country. Foreign currency transactions were more rapid and cheaper in the streets than in the commercial banks. Kinshasa's "Wall Street", or the area between the central railway station, the American Embassy and the Belgian Embassy near the 30 June Boulevard, served as the major foreign exchange market and the nerve centre of the informal economy in the Congo. This is an economy that was unregulated, undocumented and untaxed, except for bribes and extortion to the benefit of soldiers and other state agents.

In addition to banking, activities such as automobile repair, commerce, construction, education, health care, mining, transportation and a host of other services are to be found in the informal sector. However, while it is true that people have learned to cope without the state, they still expect the state to play its traditional role as a provider of essential social services. Thus, the informalisation of the economy presents a paradox. On the one hand, it makes people more independent of the state and thus capable of assuming an autonomous role vis-à-vis the state in satisfying their basic needs. Hence, the need for a limited government, or for circumscribing the realm of state activity in such a way that sufficient space is left for non-state actors. On the other hand, it also makes people yearn for a stronger state with increased capacity in service delivery. Both attitudes are part of the Congolese political culture, and they are important for understanding popular expectations in the current political situation.

# From Mobutu Sese Seko to Laurent-Désiré Kabila

## The Seven-Month War to Overthrow the Mobutu Regime

The fall of the Mobutu regime resulted from a combination of internal weaknesses and the exploitation of these weaknesses by neighbouring countries to get rid of a dictator that most Africans had come to despise. Systemic and widespread corruption since the early 1970s had already undermined the capacity of the state to discharge its normal functions of order maintenance, revenue collection and service delivery. The loss of popular legitimacy and the total rejection of the Mobutu regime by the majority of delegates at the CNS helped to further erode the morale of the security forces, the main pillar of regime survival. As high-ranking officers were more concerned with their own wealth-acquisition activities than the training, discipline and welfare of their troops, Mobutu's huge army became a veritable paper tiger.

Of the nine countries with which the Congo shares borders, Angola, Burundi and Rwanda had legitimate grievances with respect to the Mobutu regime's sympathy, and in some instances active support, for their respective rebels. Dissident groups from Uganda and Congo-Brazzaville could also take advantage of the collapse of state institutions, including the security forces, to use Mobutu's Zaire as a launching pad for raids against their own countries. In this situation, the disintegration of the Mobutu regime provided Rwanda with an opportunity to make incursions into the Kivu provinces in order to destroy the bases of the ex-FAR and the *Interahamwe*, beginning in August 1996. When it appeared that the Mobutu regime was militarily incapable of challenging these incursions, Rwanda and Uganda assembled a coalition of states in Eastern and Southern Africa including Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe with the objective of getting rid of Mobutu altogether. And the war that led to his demise began on 6 October 1996 with a massive Rwandan invasion of the UNHCR refugee camps in Kivu.

In order to provide a Congolese cover to the Rwandan invasion and the regional conspiracy, the coalition found a retired Congolese revolutionary

and put him in charge of the propaganda war as leader of the national struggle to liberate the Congo from Mobutu. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the revolutionary, had already left his mark in Congo's guerrilla wars between 1960 and 1985: as a leader in the BALUBAKAT resistance against Moïse Tshombe and the Katanga secession, 1960–63; as the second in command for the eastern wing of the popular insurrections between 1964 and 1966; and as president of the *Parti Révolutionnaire du Peuple* (PRP) and its guerrilla army in the mountains along Lake Tanganyika, 1967–85. While Kabila kept the PRP as his vehicle for revolutionary change in the Congo after switching from warlord to business operator in 1985, it is a well known fact that even during his halcyon days of guerrilla warfare, he preferred the comforts and pleasures of city lights to the rigour of the bush. This is confirmed by the Argentine-born Cuban revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, who witnessed only one visit by Kabila to his guerrilla camp during a seven-month stay in the Congo bush in 1965.<sup>1</sup>

On 18 October 1996, nearly two weeks after the Rwandan invasion, a loose alliance of four obscure groups was established at Lamera, in South Kivu. The Lamera Protocol established the AFDL as an alliance of the following four groups:

The *Alliance Démocratique des Peuples* (ADP, or People's Democratic Alliance), a grouping of Congolese Tutsi led by Déogratias Bugera; The *Conseil National de Résistance pour la Démocratie* (CNRD, or National Council for Resistance and Democracy), a Lumumbist guerrilla group established in 1993 in eastern Congo by André Kisase Ngandu; The *Mouvement Révolutionnaire pour la Libération du Zaïre* (MRLZ, or Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation of Zaire), a South Kivu opposition group led by Anselme Masasu Nindaga; and Kabila's PRP.

As a political alliance, the AFDL did not have the military organisation capable of defeating the otherwise weak and demoralized Mobutu's army. Relying heavily on the Kadogo or child soldiers, whose principal role was to intimidate unarmed

1. See William Galvez, *Che in Africa: Che Guevara's Congo Diary*, translated by Mary Todd (Melbourne and New York: Ocean Press, 1999).

civilians, Kabila and his allies were lucky to win the support of the Angolan government. The latter provided assistance by allowing Congolese exiles who had accumulated military experience as auxiliaries of the Angolan army to join the AFDL drive against Mobutu. The *tigres* showed their tiger like mettle in defeating Mobutu's Serbo-Croatian mercenaries at Kisangani, his DSP near Lubumbashi, and Jonas Savimbi's fighters at Kenge. Since most Congolese military units simply dropped their arms and uniforms and ran away, much of the rest of the fighting involved the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), which was pursuing and killing Hutu refugees running from east to west across the vast Equatorial Forest.

Other RPA units led the Kadogo and older AFDL recruits into a long march that culminated in a triumphant entry into Kinshasa on Saturday, 17 May 1997. In Lubumbashi, Kabila announced the fall of the Mobutu regime, changed the name of the country back to "Congo", and proclaimed himself president. The crucial role that Rwanda played in Mobutu's demise and Kabila's rise to power manifested itself in the naming of James Kabarebe, a Rwandan military officer as chief of staff of the newly established Congolese army, the *Forces Armées Congolaises* (FAC), and the prominent positions occupied by Congolese Tutsi close to the RPF regime of Paul Kagame in top posts in Kabila's administration, including those of foreign minister, personal secretary to the president, and secretary general of the AFDL.

### A New Dictator for the Congo

At its birth, the AFDL had two major leaders: Kisase Ngandu as military commander and Kabila as *porte parole* or spokesperson. As the better known of the two, Kabila was certainly considered as the leader of the group by the African coalition, which sponsored it. Kisase was killed under mysterious circumstances in January 1997, clearing the way for Kabila to become the undisputed leader of the AFDL. This happened a few months later, as the constituent groups merged into a single organisation, with Kabila as president, Bugera as secretary-general, and Masasu as military commander. Bugera was eventually removed from the party post in May 1998 and named Minister of State in President's office, with no particular portfolio. Masasu

was arrested for "indiscipline" on 25 November 1997. Released from detention in April 2000, he was arrested again seven months later and summarily executed on 24 November 2000 at Pweto, in Katanga. By 1999, the AFDL itself disappeared as a political organisation, to be replaced by the *Comités de Pouvoir Populaire* (CPP), people's power committees. As if history were repeating itself, with the advent of yet another one-man rule in the Congo, Laurent Kabila succeeded in establishing himself in Mobutu's image as "*l'homme seul*".<sup>1</sup>

In doing so, Kabila missed a historic opportunity to establish himself as a great and esteemed leader in the tradition of Patrice Lumumba. The victory of the AFDL and the fall of the Mobutu regime constituted a momentous event in the history of postcolonial Africa. The involvement of neighbouring countries in this event was widely acclaimed throughout Africa as a rightful assertion of the Pan-African right of intervention. In the wake of the genocide in Rwanda, there is an emerging consensus that Africans can no longer remain indifferent to gross violations of human rights on the continent because of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. At the same time, it is widely felt that once regional actors have helped in freeing a country from oppression, they should return home and leave the business of governance and security to nationals.

In the DRC case, two of the countries that helped Kabila take over did overstay their welcome. Rwanda and Uganda, and particularly the first, wanted to retain control over the Congo's destiny. This reinforced both the external factor in the new political dispensation and the alienation of the Kabila regime from a population that had been energized by the CNS. The more President Kabila attempted to dismiss the CNS as useless, the more he appeared to be beholden to external forces. He failed to understand that the Rwandan-led military adventure alone could not account for the overthrow of the Mobutu regime. For the latter could not have crumbled as easily as it did had it not been undermined and thoroughly weakened by the non-violent actions of the political opposition and civil society which culminated in the CNS.

1. The notion of Mobutu as the indispensable and only leader capable of holding the Congo together was first popularized by a former journalist colleague and Belgian friend of his, Francis Monheim, *Mobutu, l'homme seul* (Brussels, 1962).

Thus, establishing effective institutions of governance for national reconstruction and the transition to democracy required the recognition and reconciliation of two historical sources of political legitimacy: the democratic legacy of the Sovereign National Conference and the revolutionary legitimacy of the AFDL, which resides mainly in the fact that Kabila and his followers succeeded where the CNS had failed, by effectively ending the Mobutu regime.

However, having acquired his international legitimacy through the barrel of a gun and through a process that did not require mass mobilisation and participation, President Kabila, like Mobutu before him, saw himself in imperial fashion as being indispensable. He felt that he had been chosen by God to lead the Congo and that the people of this country owed him everything. This mentality was reinforced by his communications director, Dominique Sakombi Inongo, who is Mobutu's former chief propagandist and a fundamentalist Christian evangelist.

As a self-proclaimed ruler initially backed by external powers, Laurent-Désiré Kabila did not see the need to win the people's confidence. Without it, his regime was perceived, at least until August 1998, as an occupying force, with interests other than those of the Congolese people at heart. Kabila had a great opportunity to correct this perception in 1997, following his ascent to power, and to build a broad national constituency in 1998, in the wake of the failed attempt by Rwandan and Ugandan troops to capture Kinshasa. But he squandered both occasions. In the first instance, Kabila failed to see that since the people recognized the positive achievements of the National Conference as representing their interests, the best way to win their support and to undertake a successful political transition in the Congo was to marry the two sources of legitimacy: the democratic legacy of the CNS and the revolutionary legacy of the AFDL. For this to happen, a genuine reconciliation was needed between the democratic forces of the CNS and the revolutionary forces of the AFDL. In the second instance, Kabila as a hero of the popular struggle against external aggression opted for personal rule and dictatorship instead of responding positively to the people's aspirations for freedom and material well-being.

Instead of leading the country in this direction, the regime of the older Kabila was characterized by lack of cohesion, vision, technical competence and a credible programme of national reconstruction and development. With its adventurism, amateurism and unorthodox ways of conducting state business, the regime did not succeed in making a clean and radical break with the past. Civil servants were still not paid regularly, a factor that encouraged petty corruption and undermined administrative effectiveness. The soldier's uniform and gun were still symbols of oppression, as they continued to be used to extort goods from innocent civilians. And, what was even more shocking for those who had experienced a growing degree of freedom during the twilight of the Mobutu regime, the free press, freedom of expression and the right to organize freely were being repressed under the rule of Laurent-Désiré Kabila. Even civilians were taken to military courts on charges involving freedom of expression.

### The War for Congo's Natural Resources

Kabila's undemocratic rule made it easier for those who invaded the Congo in 1998 to pretend that they were simply supporting Congolese political factions in a war against a dictatorial regime. One of the greatest myths that the international media have helped to propagate is that Rwanda and Uganda had entered the country on the side of rebels in a civil war in the Congo. This is a myth because there was no fighting in the Congo prior to the invasion of the country by Rwandan and Ugandan troops on 2 August 1998. And the Congolese rebels in question did not exist prior to August 1998. In fact, many of the prominent leaders of what would become the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD, or Congolese Rally for Democracy), the first major rebel group, were until they deserted Kabila before the end of July 1998, leading figures in his regime:

*Déogratias Bugeru*, already mentioned above, Minister of State at the Presidency;

*Sylvain Buki*, deputy commander of the important Goma garrison of the FAC and a major Congolese actor in the Rwandan-led military campaign;

*Jacques Depelchin* and *Shambuyi Kalala*, the then serving and the former chief of staff to Bugeru;

*Bizima Karaha*, Minister of Foreign Affairs;

*Moïse Nyarugabo*, head of the Office of Ill-Gotten Goods, an anti-corruption parastatal, after serving as Kabila's private secretary;

*Jean-Pierre Ondekane*, commander of the Goma garrison and a trusted lieutenant of the FAC chief of staff, Commander James Kabarebe of the RPA and the commander of the Rwandan expeditionary force; and

*Azarias Ruberwa*, Bizima Karaha's chief of staff at the Foreign Ministry.

All of these men were central to the plot against Kabila, which had been hatching since at least May 1998, when Bugera was moved from the AFDL Secretariat to the Presidency. It became all the more urgent following the dismissal of Commander James as chief of staff of the FAC on 13 July and Kabila's order of 27 July to send all foreign military personnel back home. This is what prompted the simultaneous invasion by Rwandan and Ugandan forces and uprisings by military units in Goma and Kinshasa whose commanders were part of the ongoing plot. The idea was to seize power in Kinshasa and install a regime that would be more manageable from the standpoint of Rwandan and Ugandan interests than Kabila's. Failing this, the alternative was to carve out a buffer zone of economic and political security in eastern Congo. This explains the targeting of both Kinshasa and Goma. Since the intervention on the side of the regime by Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia saved Kinshasa, the invaders reconciled themselves to occupying and plundering the eastern part of the Congo.

There is no doubt that Kigali and Kampala do have legitimate security interests in the DRC and believed that their intervention was meant to secure these interests, since rebel forces from Rwanda and Uganda, the Hutu extremists in particular, have used Congolese territory to stage raids into their respective countries. But the often heard rationale about stopping the incursion of Rwandan and Ugandan rebels based in the Congo was quickly exposed as a blatant lie when Kabarebe commandeered civilian planes to take the invading troops and cargo from Goma to the Congolese military base of Kitona in the southwest, a distance of over 2,000 km from the border that the Congo shares with Rwanda and Uganda. The siege of Kinshasa,

which included the cutting off of electricity and the water supply to this city of approximately 6 million residents for several days on two separate occasions, helped to mobilise its population, the youth in particular, in a heroic resistance against the invaders. With the Angolans cutting them off from supplies and troop replenishments through Kitona, the Zimbabweans denying them access to Kinshasa airport, and the youth of Kinshasa subjecting captives to popular justice, including the dreaded necklace, the invaders were thoroughly defeated in their attempt to take over the seat of power.

With Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and, for a while, Chad intervening militarily on the side of the Kabila regime to stop the invaders, Rwanda, Uganda and, in a limited role, Burundi found it generally impossible to expand beyond the areas they had already occupied, which included much of the north and the eastern parts of the country. In this region with considerable wealth in natural resources, the invaders spent more time plundering the land of its gold, diamonds, coltan, timber, coffee and other resources than in guiding their RCD protégés in the art of governing. The looting imperative was so pervasive that in a dispute over turf, erstwhile allies Rwanda and Uganda went to war against each other for the control of Kisangani on three separate occasions between 1999 and 2000. The war in which at least eight sovereign states and a multitude of irregular forces took part in the Great Lakes region between 1998 and 2003 is best described as an inter-African war for the natural resources of the Congo.

As the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has shown in its reports, all the parties to the conflict, including Congolese officials and rebels, Congo's allies and the invaders have taken part in the pillage of the natural resources of the DRC. As a resource war, the conflict in the Great Lakes region had adventurers of all kinds, including international criminal networks involved in the arms and narcotics trades. The violence and insecurity that such a situation generates are ultimately responsible for its heavy toll in fatalities, as more people die from the social and economic consequences of the war than from killing and other acts of violence by armed groups. Mortality studies by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a US-

based NGO, have shown that more than 3 million Congolese died between August 1998 and November 2002 of war-related causes such as malnutrition, lack of health care and dangerous living conditions in areas where refuge has been sought in the bush. They are victims of crimes against humanity.

The UN panel of experts has shown that those responsible for these crimes include not only the rebels, but also “unscrupulous business people” from all over the world who, in some instances, subjected Congolese farmers and their families to devastating social effects “akin to slavery”.<sup>1</sup> The October 2002 version of the report has a list of 85 business enterprises considered by the panel to have violated the OECD guidelines for multinational corporations. Of these, 21 companies are Belgian, 12 South African, 10 UK, 8 US, 5 Canadian and 4 each for Germany and Zimbabwe.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the panel recommends the placing of financial restrictions on 29 companies, and a travel ban and financial restrictions on 54 individuals, most of whom are connected with the 29 companies. These include individuals with close ties to Presidents Joseph Kabila, Paul Kagame, Robert Mugabe and Yoweri Museveni of DRC, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Uganda, respectively; the notorious Russian arms merchant Victor Bout; and a number of Antwerp-based diamond dealers.<sup>3</sup>

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1. UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2003/1027, New York, 23 October 2003, p. 5.

2. UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2002/1146, New York, 16 October 2002, Annex III.

3. *Ibid.* Annexes I and II.

# The Need for a Successful Transition

## Managing the Political Transition

As a war of partition and plunder, the inter-African war for Congo's resources had two distinct phases: the phase of frontal attacks, 1998 to 1999; and the phase of positional consolidation, 1999 to 2003. The first phase involved substantial fighting between the two camps: the invaders and the Congolese rebels, on the one hand, and the Kinshasa government and its African allies, on the other. The first camp sought to seize political power in Kinshasa or, failing that, to conquer territory from East to West and from North to South, while the second camp was determined to prevent such an outcome. In the process, a stalemate emerged, and this made it easier for the countries of the SADC region to convene successful peace talks in Lusaka, Zambia, which led to the approval by all Congolese parties of the *Lusaka Agreement* of 10 July 1999.

The Lusaka Agreement was both a ceasefire agreement and a road map for the political transition in the Congo. For Congo's invaders and allies, it was the ceasefire that was of major interest to them, as it allowed them to concentrate on consolidating their territorial positions and use them to illegally exploit Congo's natural resources and other forms of wealth. With few exceptions, the ceasefire was respected, as everyone sought to minimize the number of body bags to be sent back home and maximize the amount of resources and wealth extracted from the Congo. Some of the fiercest fighting in the post-Lusaka period took place between erstwhile allies Rwanda and Uganda for the control of Kisangani and its rich hinterland in August 1999 and in May and August 2000. The second phase of the war ended, at least officially, with the establishment in June 2003 of the government of transition in Kinshasa in accordance with the road map of the Lusaka Agreement.

Chapter 5 of Annex A to the Lusaka Agreement calls for an inter-Congolese political negotiations process to include all parties, including the government, the rebels, the unarmed political opposition and civil society. These negotiations were to result in a reconciliation and transitional process leading to the restoration of central authority all over the

country; the disarmament of all irregular armed groups; the formation of a single national army; and the establishment of new political institutions and their legitimation through free and fair elections. Ketumile Masire, the former president of Botswana, was selected by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) as the international mediator to organize and manage the *inter-Congolese dialogue* (ICD), as the political negotiations became known.

In spite of having signed the Lusaka Agreement to please his African peers and the international community, President Laurent-Désiré Kabila was against it. While this was irresponsible behaviour, there were good reasons to oppose the Agreement. In the first place, the Agreement itself was flawed in several respects. The true nature of the war as external aggression is not acknowledged and the external actors are treated equally, whether they came as invaders or Congo's allies. Burundi, a major belligerent, is not a signatory to the Agreement. Even more shocking is the fact that rebels from Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi are outlaws who must be disarmed, while Congolese rebels are *interlocuteurs valables*, even though they were artificial creations with no social basis in the country, the RCD (later known as RCD-Goma) by Rwanda and Jean-Pierre Bemba's *Mouvement de Libération Congolais* (MLC) by Uganda. In the second place, the international community, with its characteristic policy of double standards, did not provide an adequate response to the Agreement's call for a UN force with Chapter VII powers of peace enforcement and sufficient resources to disarm the extremist Hutu militias and thus remove the very pretext that Rwanda had used for intervening in the Congo.

In spite of these shortcomings, the Congolese unarmed opposition and civil society felt that the Lusaka Agreement was the only game in town and sought to mobilize national and world public opinion to support the holding of the inter-Congolese dialogue. With the passing away of President Kabila in 2001, a major obstacle to the ICD disappeared. Joseph Kabila, his son and successor, won a great deal of support at home and abroad when he agreed to let the reconciliation process go forward. After a couple of false starts in 2001, a year-long

ICD process took place from 25 February 2002 to 1 April 2003, with the active support of South Africa and the United Nations, in the resort town of Sun City and the capital city of Pretoria. These marathon negotiations involved all five major components of the political equation in the Congo, plus three minor groups, as follows:

- The Kinshasa-based government of President Joseph Kabila;
- The RCD-Goma, the rebel movement controlling the east with Rwanda's support;
- The MLC, the Uganda-backed rebel movement in the north, which had become more autonomous;
- The unarmed political opposition, consisting of the old "radical opposition" close to Tshisekedi, the Mobutuists, and those in between;
- Representatives of civil society organizations;
- The two factions of the RCD breakaway group *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie/ Mouvement de Libération* (RCD-ML): the original group led by Professor Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba and the group that was still militarily active in the northeast under warlord Mbusa Nyamwisi;
- The *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie/National* (RCD-N), a breakaway faction from the RCD-ML; and
- The *Mai-Mai* fighters, a grassroots resistance group with multiple factions engaged in armed struggle against the invaders in the east.

Begun with approximately 360 delegates staying in the luxurious hotels of Sun City, the negotiations had their ups and downs, but they eventually resulted in the adoption of two major documents: a comprehensive and inclusive agreement on the transition, also known as the *Pretoria Agreement*, on 17 December 2002; and an interim constitution, on 6 March 2003.

The transitional arrangements consist of a complex set of institutions designed to set the democratic transition back on track, with elections to be held in 2005. The transitional institutions consist of the president, assisted by four vice-presidents; the government, composed of the president, the vice-presidents, ministers and deputy ministers; a

bicameral parliament, with a national assembly and a senate; and courts and tribunals. In addition to these institutions of state sovereignty, five democracy supporting institutions were established, as follows: the independent electoral commission; the national observatory of human rights; the high authority of the media; the truth and reconciliation commission; and the commission on ethics and the fight against corruption. Representatives of the eight signatories to the Pretoria Agreement were appointed to some or all of these institutions, with President Kabila retaining the presidency and the four posts of vice-president going one each to the government, the RCD-Goma, the MLC and the unarmed opposition.

This heavy institutional structure, with 500 deputies in the national assembly, 120 senators and hundreds of high-ranking officials in the administration and the democracy enhancing institutions, is mandated with the tasks of restoring central authority and the rule of law all over the country, establishing a single national army, and organizing and managing free and fair elections by July 2005. Progress with respect to these three major areas of the transition process has been very slow, particularly on the crucial issue of integrating the various belligerents into a single army. At the same time, fears that the "presidential space" under the 1 + 4 formula was likely to become a sphere of constant bickering and conflict seem to have been exaggerated. So far, the five individuals at the top of the transitional government have found a way to get along. Unfortunately, the Vice President for Political and Security Affairs, who represents the RCD-Goma in the government, does not seem to have full control over his group. Dissident members of this group, apparently supported by Rwanda, have on several occasions disrupted the transitional process with acts of violence in the Kivu provinces. Unless this is brought under control, it could derail the transition altogether.

### **Economic and Social Reconstruction**

Economically, the DRC has enormous wealth in natural resources. Awed by the wide range of its mineral resources, one of the first Belgian prospectors in the country was led to conclude that the Congo was a "geological scandal". The real scandal, however, is that all this wealth has never benefited

the Congolese people. In addition to using our wealth for Belgian economic development, the colonialists gave the Congo's uranium to the United States to produce the first atomic weapons, the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Under the Mobutu regime, the mineral and other wealth of the country was monopolized by the president, his family, entourage and other members of the political class.

Known primarily as a minerals producing country, the DRC has such an ecological diversity that it is also rich in non-mineral resources. Approximately one-third of the total area is made up of tropical rain forest, in a country that is three times the size of Nigeria, five times the size of France, and over 80 times that of Belgium, the former colonial power.

The whole area is dominated by the Congo River basin, and includes 7 large and medium-sized lakes plus hundreds of rivers and small lakes. Lake Tanganyika, which the DRC shares with Burundi and Tanzania, is the fifth largest lake in the world. The Congo River, which gave the country its name, is one of the five longest rivers in the world and second only to the Amazon with respect to hydroelectric potential. Part of this potential has already been harnessed through the Inga Dam to provide electricity to the Congo and some of its neighbours, including Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Inga hydroelectric complex has the potential of lighting up the whole continent of Africa, from Cairo to Cape Town.

With 12 months of rainfall in much of the rain forest and plenty of rain in the two savannah zones on each side of the Equator, the DRC has such a rich natural resource endowment that it can also feed the entire continent. Today, it is estimated that less than 3 percent of its arable land is under cultivation. The fertility of the soil and the abundance of edible fruits and vegetables help to explain why massive starvation has not occurred, despite the collapse of the formal economy. A major consequence of this collapse is that this country of over 50 million people is today exporting a large number of highly skilled people to other countries in Africa (South Africa, Gabon) and abroad.

In spite of its enormous wealth, the DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world today. The growing misery of its population has been intensified as a result of both the world-wide economic crisis that began in 1975 and the crisis of the col-

lapse of the state and its consequences for economic institutions and activities, both public and private. Millions of people are now destitute, having fallen into a deplorable state of physical want, while many others are struggling to preserve themselves and their dependants from such a cruel fate.

The long-drawn-out transition during the twilight of the Mobutu regime (1990–97) created innumerable problems for the population and exacerbated social tensions. The looting incidents of 1991 and 1993 destroyed much of the modern commercial sector of the economy, throwing thousands of wage workers out of gainful employment. Although the informal sector has allowed many to make ends meet, most of the people involved in it do not realise substantial gains likely to sustain their lives in the long run. They barely manage to survive.

Those with entrepreneurial skills and motivation cannot find a reliable and affordable source of credit for small business ventures. The banking sector has virtually collapsed, while money transactions which matter for most people have moved from banks to the streets. In Kinshasa, three major foreign exchange centres are now located at "Wall Street", Oshwe Street in the lively commercial neighbourhood of Matonge, and Lemba Terminus, a major taxi bus stop.

It is tragic that at the very instance that money has become scarce, people need it most in order to pay for services which used to be free, such as health care and education. Some health services and most school fees are payable only in foreign currency, either US dollars or Euros. Health and educational services are increasingly being provided by privately owned businesses, whose quality varies considerably, and over which the state has minimal supervision. Abuses do abound, and the quality of health care and education in the country is much worse today than 40 years ago. Needless to say, this is a direct result of the deterioration of public health and education services under the combined weight of the crisis and the adjustment policies of the Bretton Woods institutions.

In the rural areas, the situation is much worse. Even though the people are self-reliant with respect to the food they consume, they are working under serious hardships. For many decades, people in these areas had become accustomed to having access to manufactured goods as an essential part of

their household consumption, as well as to basic agricultural implements. Those with relatively higher incomes purchased bicycles and radios, while most parents could afford to buy uniforms and school supplies for their children.

With remittances from town having dried up and the mostly impracticable roads making it difficult for peasants to sell their produce in urban markets, the acquisition of manufactured goods, including essential ones such as clothes, shoes, kerosene lamps, sugar, salt, cooking oil, soap and basic agricultural implements is beyond the means of most rural dwellers. As a result, people have gone back to producing their own cooking oil, salt, soap and other basic goods according to precapitalist methods, some of which are extremely time-consuming and of very low productivity. Where there were modern maternal facilities, women are now relying on midwives for delivering their babies, under conditions that barely meet minimum sanitary standards. Overall, the quality of life in rural areas is worse today than it was 50 years ago.

Thus, in both rural and urban areas, the quality of life has declined in a drastic manner for the majority of the people, creating a climate of uncertainty and insecurity. This is the environment that demagogues find ideal for recruiting a mass following in order to gain or retain power. The ethnic cleansing in Katanga province between 1992 and 1994 was a particularly clear instance of this. When former Prime Minister Nguz and his political lieutenant, Katanga Governor Gabriel Kyungu wa Kumwanza started what they called the “Yugoslavisation of Zaire”, they exploited this insecurity to divide people and to implicate their followers in the act of ethnic cleansing. The bait dangled in the eyes of the “authentic” or native Katangans for this purpose was the take-over of all the jobs held and properties owned by the Kasaians in the province. Thousands died in the ensuing violence and in the dangerous trek of nearly a million people to Eastern and Western Kasai. Kyungu, who should be prosecuted for crimes against humanity, was made ambassador by the older Kabila, and he later became a member of the transitional parliament.

Given the economic and social debacle of the Mobutu era, the DRC needs support to rebuild the infrastructure in order to meet the basic needs of the population. With a collapsed state and nearly \$15 billion in external debt, the DRC cannot

accomplish these objectives without international economic assistance. One way of helping it in this regard is through debt relief, inasmuch as the major lenders themselves have a moral responsibility in what the Congolese perceive as odious debts or those that never benefited the country in any substantial manner, since the money was embezzled by Mobutu and his cronies. The debts became odious because the lenders knew very well what was happening, but continued to make loans in total disregard of the long-term interests of the country.

Much of the assistance designed to meet the basic needs of the people should be channelled through reputable NGOs until the state is capable of discharging its duties in a responsible manner. Support for the government should be limited to debt relief and institutional capacity building, and it should also be tied to progress with respect to human rights and democratisation. While external debt and good governance are issues which go beyond the interests of a particular regime and affect the long-term viability of the state, dealing with them effectively requires a national consensus and public accountability.

### Implications for the Great Lakes Region

Economic and social reconstruction cannot be realized without a successful political transition from arbitrary rule to the rule of law, and from self-imposed rulers to a democratically elected government in the DRC. Here, as in the rest of the continent, there is widespread recognition that a close relationship does exist between economic decay and the lack of democracy. The struggle for democracy thus revolves around the necessity to restructure the political space in such a way that political leaders are legitimate and accountable to their own people rather than to external patrons and allies. Building democratic governance is therefore a necessary condition for increased responsiveness by the rulers to the economic and social development needs of the population.

In addition to an inclusive government and national reconciliation, a major condition for a smooth political transition in the DRC is ending politically motivated violence in the east. The long-term stability of the Great Lakes region cannot be sustained without a stable and effective government in the DRC. On the other hand, there can be no

stability in the DRC, particularly in the eastern provinces, as long as the Hutu-Tutsi conflict continues to rage in Burundi, and is not resolved through democratic means in Rwanda. For there can be no durable peace and security in the Great Lakes region until a lasting solution is found to the problem of coexistence between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi. The search for such a solution must delve into the roots of the genocide ideology now plaguing these two countries, and find the most appropriate ways and means of building confidence among their divided communities.

In the DRC, the spill over of the identity conflict between Hutu and Tutsi is compounded by the land and nationality issues involving people of Rwandan origin who have settled there at different times in history. While due respect must be shown for the land rights of indigenous Congolese, every effort should be made to ensure that the rights of those Banyarwanda (both Hutu and Tutsi) and Banyamulenge who have lived in the Congo for generations, including citizenship and land rights, be protected as well.

Dealing effectively with this internal problem and helping to find an overall solution to the identity conflicts in the Great Lakes region as a whole require a strong state and a democratically elected and legitimate government in the DRC. The country's geographical location in the centre of Africa and its resource endowment give it a strategic value whose significance cannot go unnoticed. Unfortunately, this strategic value has not been utilised in the cause of peace, stability and development in the region. Only a democratic government can mobilise the political resources needed to resolve the internal problem, and only a strong state with a well equipped, well trained and disciplined army can help maintain peace and prevent violent conflict in the region. A successful political transition in the DRC can enable it to fulfil these two important missions, which are critical for peace, stability and development in Africa.

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