

Democratic Republic of Congo Country Profile – 1 December 2012

The Democratic Republic of Congo, commonly referred to as Congo-Kinshasa or the DRC, is the second largest country in Africa, with a population of over 71 million. More than 250 ethnic groups make up the DRC's population. Of the Bantu groups, the Mongo, Luba, Kong, and Mangbetu-Azande make up about 45% of the population. The country has a Belgian population of 60,000.

Initially claimed as the personal property of the Belgian King Leopold, his genocidal exploitation of rubber and ivory led to millions of deaths. An international protest eventually led to colonization by Belgium. In 1960 the Mouvement National Congolais won parliamentary elections and Patrice Lumumba, became Prime Minister. The Congo achieved independence later that year. A majority of the 100,000 Europeans fled the country. Lumumba was murdered, and the Chief of the Army, Mobutu Sese Seko, seized power.

Mobutu changed the country's name to "Republic of Zaire", and was supported by the United States due to Mobutu's opposition to Communism. Rigged re-elections, gross corruption and human rights violations plagued his administration. In the early 1990s, opponents within Zaire began to demand governmental reforms. Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, Hutu militias fled into eastern Zaire and allied with Zaire's army, launched a campaign against the Congolese Tutsi population. In 1996, a coalition of the Rwandan and Ugandan Armies invaded Zaire to overthrow Mobutu's government and the Hutu militias, launching the First Congo War. Mobutu was forced to flee Zaire in 1997. The nation was renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A new government was established under Laurent Kabila, but fearing the continued presence of Rwandan and Ugandan forces in the DRC, he demanded that they leave. Rwandan and Ugandan forces attacked the DRC army in 1998. The ensuing war also involved troops from Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. Laurent Kabila was assassinated by one of his own bodyguards. Joseph Kabila, the son of the assassinated President, appealed to the United Nations for multi-lateral talks. U.N. peacekeepers arrived and a peace agreement was signed with Kabila sharing power with leaders from other factions.

By 2003, most foreign armies had retreated and elections were held. The DRC's first multiparty elections occurred in 2006, and a constitution was approved. Joseph Kabila received 45% of the vote, with his opponent Jean-Pierre Bemba, taking 20%. The results were disputed, leading to more violence and intervention by U.N. peacekeeping forces. A new election occurred later that year, with Kabila taking 70% and being sworn into the Presidency.

Violence continued, with armed rebellion in Eastern Congo by Tutsi forces, eventually leading to the March 23 Movement in 2012. Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army moved from Uganda and South Sudan to the DRC in 2005, before fleeing into the Central African Republic. Local militias, the Mutomboki, also became violent. Since 2009, an estimated 45,000 people have died per month. Estimates of total deaths since 1996 range up to five million. Widespread disease and famine due to conflict have killed more people than atrocity crimes. Sexual violence and destruction of property are rampant, causing widespread displacement of people and hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

The presence of Ex-Rwandan genocidists, local militias, and mineral warlords have led to the massacres of thousands of people. M23, (allegedly supported by Rwanda, which Rwanda denies), has taken control of North Kivu. A Hutu militia, the FDLR, is at war with M23 as well as with the Raia Mutomboki, a Congolese militia that targets anyone who speaks Kinyarwanda. Both groups have massacred entire villages and are responsible for mass rape and forced displacement.

The DRC remains at stage 7, with genocidal massacres in North and South Kivu.