

Congo Elections Brief

On November 28, 2011, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) held its second presidential and parliamentary elections since the devastating war that began in 1996 and continues to claim lives in the eastern part of the country. Assassinations, intimidation, and other human rights violations have been documented since the beginning of the electoral process. Human Rights Watch reported that of the 18 people dead as a result of electoral violence on November 26, the majority of those killed were shot dead by President Kabila's Republican Guard soldiers in Kinshasa.

On December 9, 2011, the preliminary presidential election results were announced. The electoral commission reported that Joseph Kabila was the leading candidate with 8,880,944 votes, or 49% of the votes cast. He was followed by Etienne Tshisekedi with 5,864,775 or 32%. The Supreme Court approved the results on December 16th and President Kabila was sworn in for his second five-year term on December 20th.

The Archbishop of the Catholic Church in Kinshasa, Cardinal L. Monsengwo Pasina says the results correspond neither to truth nor justice. The Carter Center who observed the elections said that they lacked credibility. The Carter Center also observed that 2,000 polling station results numbering 750,000 votes were missing in Kinshasa alone. The European Union deplored the lack of transparency, and the irregularities in the collection, compilation and publication of the results. They also noted that results from 4,875 polling stations totaling 1.6 million votes were missing.

Steps taken by the Kabila regime ranging from the change in the constitution, appointment of a member of his party and close adviser as president of the electoral commission, and the stacking of the Supreme Court at the outset of the launch of the electoral campaign all strongly suggest a premeditated attempt to rig the elections or produce a fraudulent outcome.

Impunity and lack of accountability and justice have been the hallmark of Central Africa for the past 15 years. Although, the United Nations published the Mapping Exercise Report and the US Congress passed into law the Democratic Republic of Congo, Relief, Security and Democracy Promotion Act, both of which call for the global community to address matters of accountability, impunity and justice in the region, very little action has been taken. United States allies, Rwanda and Uganda held presidential elections that were deeply flawed yet they continue to benefit from United States funding, military training, intelligence and political and diplomatic support.

The fundamentally flawed elections in the Congo is the third – Rwanda and Uganda being the previous two - and probably the most egregious in series of authoritarian exercises that have left the people of the region under the heels of repressive regimes with lifelines to the West.

Immediate action must be taken by the United States as it relates to the current Congo crisis, however, existing mechanism at the disposal of the United States and other world actors must be brought to bear

as well. Therefore, The Great Lakes Advocacy Coalition recommends the following:

1. Refrain from recognizing Joseph Kabila as the legitimate President of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
2. Facilitate a high-level mediation process made up of the Southern African Development Community, the African Union, The European Union, The United Nations, select respected former African heads of states and representatives from the United States, England and China to break the current political stalemate.
3. Assure that the will of the people is accurately reflected in the compilation of the legislative results.
4. Continue to engage the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a committed and helpful partner by strongly condemning, pressuring and assisting to hold accountable those responsible for the violence that occurred before, during and after the elections.
5. Take the lead on fulfilling the recommendations from the UN Mapping Exercise Report and Public Law 109-456, especially sections 201 (1) and 105.

It is critical that the current political crisis in the Congo is given the attention it deserves with the particular focus on making sure that the will of the Congolese people is respected.