

**REPORT OF CHRIS LEVICK AN
INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER WITH
THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
CONGO FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL RUN-
OFF AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS
HELD ON SUNDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2006.**

**RAPPORT DE CHRIS LEVICK UN OBSERVATEUR INTERNATIONAL AVEC
L'ASSOCIATION POUR LES NATIONS UNIES DE LE REPUBLIQUE
DEMOCRATIQUE DE CONGO POUR LE SECOND TOUR DES ELECTIONS
PRESIDENTIELLES ET DES DEPUTES PROVINCIAUX A TENU DIMANCHE, 29
OCTOBRE 2006**

NOVEMBER 2006

**Report of Chris Levick an International Observer with the United Nations
Association of the Democratic Republic of Congo for the Presidential Run-off
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I was delighted to be invited to Kinshasa by the UN Association of the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNA-DRC) to observe the election that took place on 29 October 2006. I would like to express the deep sense of appreciation that I hold towards all those at UNA-DRC for the time and effort that they invested into getting my accreditation from the *Commission Electorale Indépendante* (CEI) and also for the hospitality that they extended towards me during my trip to Kinshasa. I must give special thanks to Mr. Aime Pingi and Miss. Julie Malanga who extended untiring hospitality and friendship towards me which made my visit most enjoyable, I am very grateful. This report outlines my activities and observations during my time in Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC from 26-31 October 2006.

My arrival having travelled to Kinshasa from Paris was not without incident. I disembarked the plane and walked across the busy, if slightly chaotically organised, apron of the airport towards the terminal building. Waiting outside of the building was a group of officials checking passports – I presume for visas – although this was before the immigration booths located inside the terminal building. I had obtained a visa from the Congolese Embassy in London prior to travelling to the DRC; I must also praise the efficiency of their services issuing me a visa in under 72 hours. The official outside the terminal, although he did not explain the situation to me, was clearly not happy with something. He instructed me to follow him inside the building and took me into a small office on the right-hand side of the arrivals hall, just before the immigrations desks, and handed my passport to another official sat in the office. I was instructed to sit on a chair along the wall, there were around half a dozen other people who had also been brought into the room and given the same instruction. There was a large elegant looking picture of Joseph Kabila on the wall with the caption “*La Président de la République Démocratique du Congo, Lt. Gen. Joseph Kabila*” in large black writing. Officials entered and left the small office with ever increasing frequency. Before travelling I had been advised that there was a fair amount of corruption at the airport, I assured that I could keep an eye on my passport at all times.

After being held for a short time in this room, with nothing having been explained to me or any of the others, we were each allowed to go one-by-one, I was escorted over

to the immigrations booth where an official proceeded to stamp my passport. Following this event, slightly shaken and apprehensive, I proceeded to the baggage hall to collect my small suitcase. I was met by another man who asked for my baggage receipt, I naively handed it over and he waited with me checking bags as they passed, I assured that I was stood to his left so that I was further down the belt in order to be able to get my case before it reached him. When it arrived he followed me outside the terminal and asked for money for his “service”, I did not give him any. I think he recognised that I was slightly nervous of his presence and repeatedly showed me an official looking airport badge with his photograph on; I remain sceptical as to whether he was a genuine airport official. He did not leave my side trying to ask me questions, which I did not answer, until I was met by Aime and Julie of UNA-DRC outside the terminal who had come to facilitate my arrival. I found my whole journey through the arrivals area of the airport slightly intimidating and thankfully the experience was not a precursor for the rest of my trip.

I found the following drive through the very calm city of Kinshasa a fairly spectacular experience. Election fever had gripped Kinshasa and was being fully embraced by many of the city's 6 million residents. I noticed a large number of people wearing t-shirts featuring the name and face of their favoured candidate, many grouped together on the sides of the road peacefully campaigning for either Joseph Kabila or Jean-Pierre Bemba. These groups seemed to co-exist in fairly close proximity with no qualms between them. The roads were lined with posters, large billboards and banners reaching right across the wide streets. I found this a great spectacle to witness in the dark, and it would be far livelier the next day.

The next morning I accompanied Aime on several errands that he had to make, in addition to making a stop by the British Embassy in order to register my presence in the DRC. Earlier that morning he had given me my yellow international observer photo badge and told me to carry this with me at all times; evidently the authorities would offer assistance to international observers in the event that any trouble would arise. This was to be the final day of the campaign and further to what I had been able to see in the night, the dusty streets were littered with the posters of candidates in the provincial election. I remember driving down one Kinshasa avenue flanked with rows of trees either side, each tree as far as the eye could see bearing at the very least two campaign posters. There were many groups of supporters of the two presidential candidates riding around the city in vans – which normally serve the city as buses – packed to the rafters including a number of people sat on the roof! They

spent most of the day driving around the city chanting the name of their supported candidate. Again, as with the evening before, these groups seemed to co-exist peacefully. We also made a trip to the headquarters of the CEI located in downtown Kinshasa where Aime needed to collect an extra couple of badges for national observers who had been left out of the original batch he had collected earlier that morning.

The following day we would attend a meeting with many of the other Kinshasa based observers accredited as part of the UNA-DRC team. It was wonderful to meet some many members and affiliates of the association and to see that they were actively involved in the electoral process. We all packed into the UNA-DRC office, people kept returning to the door from time-to-time with additional chairs that they had managed to find. I would estimate that there were approximately thirty to forty people at the meeting. During the proceedings I was invited to say a few words to the other observers. I began by introducing myself and then thanked the association and its members for hosting my trip to observe the elections and told the meeting I was very pleased to be in the DRC, unfortunately I had to keep my comments briefer than I would have liked as my inadequate French failed me. Later that day we travelled back to the commune where I was staying. Around the corner there was a bridge from which I heard several bursts of automatic gunfire, I looked out the window to see all the people who were on the street running up the road away from each burst, then returning to the end of the street in a fashion of curious caution to see what was going on. With each additional burst of gunfire this process was repeated. I responded by locking the door and closing the curtains, later it was explained to me that this was the police on the bridge firing into the air in order to clear a crowd that had gathered. This served as a stark reminder of the realities of conflict in the DRC.

Election Day

Over the Election Day I would be based in Kinshasa. I had set my alarm for 0500 as the polling stations were due to open at 0600. The night before polling and into Sunday morning saw an almighty great storm over Kinshasa; one of the largest storms I have ever experienced with an impressive electric display over the corrugated tin roofs of the Kinshasa commune. I was eager to get to the polling station but was told that with a storm of this size, it was unlikely that the stations would open on time. So we sat tight until an available car was found that would take

us the short journey to *L'Institut Kimvula* (polling centre number 1048/1049) a large school in Kinshasa's *Commune de Kintambo* in which each room served as a polling station during the day.

The elections in the DRC were organised far differently to how they are here in the UK. Where we have a system of one small polling station serving a location, in the DRC there seemed to be a large voting centre with several – in the case of *L'Institut Kimvula* many – different voting stations within that centre. When I arrived I thought that this system may be a little confusing and difficult to organise, however, I was pleasantly surprised to see that in practice the system operated very smoothly. Each registered voter receives a photographic voting card which they must produce in order to be able to cast their vote on polling day; the card contains information at the top as to which station within the centre they must present themselves to in order to vote. There were many signs posted around the entrances to the polling centre that made this procedure clear to the voters entering. From the thousands of voters that I saw coming into the centre, I only witnessed a handful of people present themselves to the wrong station, and those who did were helpfully redirected by the Electoral Agents; easily identifiable by their orange vests. As we arrived, still under the rains of the African wet season, there were many voters already in the centre looking for their specified stations, a constant stream of people passing through with a highly visible police presence.

I decided that I would start by entering the polling station closest to where our driver had dropped us off, office number 1048B. Each office within the given centre is identified by a letter after the main station number. I went passed the small queue outside the station and presented myself to the electoral agent at the door, on showing my observer badge I gained access to the station without problem. As the centre had been open for some time prior to our arrival the two ballot boxes – approximately one and a half metres tall with clear side panels, one coloured orange for the presidential election and the other white for the provincial ballot – had already been sealed. Before I took a seat along one wall I inspected the seals on the ballot boxes to see that they were securely fastened. As this was the first station I visited on the day of the election, this was the first time I had been able to view for myself the process each voter would go through.

On their arrival at the station they would present their voter identification card to the agent waiting at the door of the station. When that agent had verified that the voter

was in the correct place, they were invited to enter and went to the next agent in the process. This agent would then verify the person's identity against their photograph on their card, I saw several people being asked to remove their hats this assured me that this verification was a thorough process. Their name would then be identified on the register and their hands inspected for indelible ink, if present would show that the person had already voted. I was also satisfied that this was a thorough inspection, many people only voluntarily presented one of their hands or only one side for inspection, on the several occasions where I had observed this, the electoral agent asked to see their other hand or the other side. This was on few occasions problematic with mothers carrying their small children, the child was juggled from hand-to-hand while the inspection was undertaken. One person I spoke to prior to the election showed me that they still had a small amount of indelible ink on their hand from the previous election back in July.

Following a successful inspection, the voter passed their card to the election agent sat by the exit and proceeded to collect their presidential ballot paper from another agent in the office, then were sent to the very unstable but more than adequate cardboard voting booths to cast their vote. The presidential paper was A5 in size with a picture along side the name of each of the two candidates: Jean-Pierre Bemba first followed by Joseph Kabila, each of the papers – presidential and provincial – required the signature of the office *President* (head) in the top left-hand corner before it could be used. I observed several people preparing to mark their ballot outside of the voting booths on the table of the agent handing out the papers, in these circumstances the agents intervened and sent the voters into the booths; this is to assure the secrecy of the poll. The voter would then fold and deposit their ballot into the orange presidential election ballot box. The larger A3 sized ballot paper with the 41 provincial candidates was then collected with the voter being sent back into the booth to cast their vote, fold their paper and deposit in into the white provincial election ballot box. There seemed to be little to no confusion to which box each of the two papers should be deposited in, however, on few occasions the agents were asked for help. A few times I observed people coming out of the booths with their unfolded papers in toe to ask the electoral agents where they would deposit their papers, the agents instructed the voters to fold their own papers before offering any further assistance.

On completion and deposit of the two ballot papers the voter then proceeded to the final agent seated next to the exit. They were asked to sign or finger print a second

copy of the register next to their name as an acknowledgment of their vote. They then had their finger dipped in the indelible ink – some voters were slightly reluctant to undergo this part of the process – and then had their election card returned. Although this sounds a fairly lengthy and laborious process for each voter, in reality the system worked and flowed with few hold-ups, the whole procedure took approximately 3-4 minutes. Further, I would deem that all elements of this procedure are necessary for the fairness and secrecy of the poll.

After spending approximately one hour in this polling station I decided that I would go and look through some of the others within the centre. I continued my journey through several of the stations inspecting the seals of the ballot boxes and spending a short period observing the standard of operation in each. In one of the polling stations (1048F) that I briefly visited, on inspecting the seals on the ballot boxes I noticed that the boxes had been labelled in the opposite way to each of the other offices. The white box was marked as being for the presidential ballot and the orange for the provincial. I think that, although I did not observe any issues with the mix up, some voters could find this confusing and deposit their ballot papers in the wrong boxes resulting in them not being counted. It would be desirable if this situation could be avoided in the future, in elections of this nature continuity is essential. I had decided that as there were a large number of other national observers and candidate witnesses in each of the offices that I would keep moving between the rooms until I came across one with few or no other observers. This is exactly what I came across when I entered voting office number 1049E (CV1), this office was located slightly out of the way in comparison with many of the others, with a large puddle outside the door making access without getting wet feet difficult. I think that this may have discouraged other observers from wanting to go over to this area of the polling centre.

On entering the station, I noticed that the room was considerably smaller and darker than all of the other voting stations in the centre. There were only two voting booths in the room rather than the standard four that had been erected in each of the other voting stations that I had visited. The floor in the room had a large number of potholes, some of which were filling with water; I remember thinking at the time that this could present a substantial problem when it came to counting the votes. The ballot boxes had been placed on a small child's table in the room, although the table was fairly low, the additional height of the ballot boxes made it difficult for many to reach. After witnessing several voters struggle to deposit their papers in the boxes –

not being able to see the slot in the top – I suggested to the Head of the station that the boxes be moved on to the floor, as they were in all of the other stations. The boxes were duly moved, this avoided any future complications. I watched carefully as the ballot boxes were moved, although I had already inspected the seals, I wanted to be sure that no papers would come from the bottom of the ballot boxes. Before this had happened one woman was sufficiently stumped on how to get her paper into the box that she gingerly tried to move the seals to see if this was how to get the paper in, one agent came to assist her. Following this I went to the box in question to re-examine the seal that she had moved – she had not managed to damage it.

While I was in this polling station I witnessed two people within a very short space of time that had problems with their voting cards. The first time a man had presented himself and his card to the electoral agent standing at the door of the station, I realised that something abnormal was happening when he entered the station with the man, handed his voting card to the agent with the register and summoned the Head of the station. I could see that the mans voting card was clearly very dog-eared, and that the lamination had come open at the top allowing the photograph to either be removed or fall out. The mans name was located on the register, so he was at the correct voting station, however, with no photograph in his voter card there was no way that a satisfactory verification of the mans identity could be reached. There was some discussion between the electoral agents, but after a couple of minutes the man was turned away not being allowed to vote. I feel that this was the right course of action in these circumstances as there was no method of identification. The second incident began with the same procedure; the outside agent entered with the voter and summoned the Head. This time the man's voting card appeared to be slightly burnt in the top-right hand corner, this had obscured the details of the voting office in which he was meant to present himself. The voter's name, which was clearly visible on the card, was located on the register and the man was allowed to vote. Again, in this circumstance I believe that this was the correct action to take as the man's details and photograph were still intact allowing for a satisfactory identification.

On a couple of occasions I witnessed what I assume were illiterate voters taking an assistant with them into the voting booths. This was always preceded by a discussion with the Head of the station who seemed to be satisfied that there was genuine need for an assistant to accompany the voter into the booth. I do feel that in the strictest terms of the definition that this does compromise the secrecy of the poll; furthermore the ballot papers also had pictures of each individual candidate, so I do believe that

this is an obstacle that could be overcome. On my return to the UK, a quick google search reveals that the DRC has an adult literacy rate of around 65 per cent, so I would expect this eventuality to occur with increasing frequency than I observed. When considering my actions towards these observations at the time, I felt as long as the voter folded and deposited their own ballot papers into the boxes that this demonstrated a sufficient degree of consent on their behalf and that the vote had been freely cast within their own will. In light of this, I decided not to intervene. With the value of hindsight I am now in two minds if this was the right decision, and I think that clear guidelines need to be established.

The light began to fail in the station as the last trickle of voters came through in the final twenty minutes or so of voting. The agents produced a large electric lantern from the materials that they had been delivered, this was used on the agents' desk for locating voters on the register and for them to sign on exiting the station. However, there was no lighting provided within the voting booths themselves. I saw a few people beginning to come out of the booths and go towards the window at the rear of the room in order to identify their preferred candidate. I felt that this could jeopardise the secrecy of the poll and reached into my bag and produced a small torch I was carrying with me. I stood behind on the outside of the cardboard booth and shone the torch over the top to provide some light for the last few voters. The agents expressed their gratitude for me assisting in this way. According to my watch the polling station was closed at exactly 1830hrs.

The agents, and I, all took a short break where they each had a sandwich and some water before they proceeded to the count. I had stepped just outside the door of the station for a few moments to catch some air when one of the agents came to tell me that they were ready and that I should come back inside. She had made sure that she called me back inside the station before the seals on the ballot boxes were broken. One agent proceeded to lay the two unused voting booths in their flat-pack form onto the wet floor, I was glad to see that the agents had already planned in line with my earlier observation of the wet floor and had also foreseen the problem that this could cause during the count. The total number of people who had voted in the station was totted up from both registers, and the two agents agreed that 224 of the expected 360 voters in this station had cast their votes. This is a considerably lower turnout than had been expected, I performed a quick calculation and came up with a 62 per cent turnout in this particular station. This is much lower than the turnout in the

first round election back in July, and I can only cite the poor weather on the day to explain this lower figure.

The seals on the ballot boxes were duly broken - the presidential election was counted first. The papers were tipped out onto the two flat booths on the floor, I went over to the empty ballot box with my torch to check that all of the papers had been tipped out. One of the agents got down on his hands and knees and counted the papers – out loud – back into the box. The number of papers matched the 224 calculated from the registers. Again the papers were tipped onto the floor and I checked again that the box was empty. The same agent got back onto his hands and knees and began to sort the papers, picking them up from the pile one-by-one, saying the name of the candidate out loud and showing the ballot papers to the other agents and myself. I kept a tally of the votes in my notebook throughout this process; one of the agents was also doing the same on the official CEI paperwork. When this process was complete the two piles of papers were again counted to verify the number against what the agent had tallied on the paperwork. Again, the numbers the agent, myself and the verification count all matched. The official paperwork was completed and I witnessed all of the agents sign. As expected, there was a significant victory for Mr. Bemba in this polling station, Kinshasa and the west of the DRC is where Bemba finds the vast majority of his support. I attach the results from station 1049E (CV) as an annex to this report.

After another short breather, the seals on the second ballot box for the provincial election were broken. The same process of counting the votes was followed as with the presidential count, again I assured that the ballot box was empty each time the papers were tipped onto the floor. The agent tried to follow the same system as before sorting the papers into piles of the selected candidates. Owing to the large number of candidates on the ballot paper and the sheer spread of votes, this very soon proved to be problematic and this system was abandoned. Another agent went to the large chalk board on one of the walls of the station and wrote out the numbers 1 through 41, this corresponded with the number each candidate had been assigned on the ballot paper. As the votes were announced by the same agent as the presidential poll, a tally mark was put onto the board next to the corresponding candidate. I observed the two processes very carefully, looking at both the ballot paper that was being read out and seeing that the mark on the board had been placed next to the appropriate number. Once all of the votes had been tallied in this way the agents and I preformed a simple addition of all the numbers to see that the

total corresponded with the number of votes cast – it did. There was one spoiled paper in this count. I again witnessed the official CEI paperwork being completed and signed by each of the agents.

The total period taken to count the votes in this station was around two hours. Before leaving I spoke briefly with the Head of the station and congratulated him and his team for a very efficiently and transparently run polling station. If this station is anything to the judge the whole electoral process by – and it is the only first hand method of judgement I have – the process was equally transparent, free and fair as any election I have seen here in the UK. I was highly impressed by the conduct of all of the agents and voters that I had witnessed throughout the day, this gives me great confidence in the eventual result of the election.

Conclusion

Although not specifically in this context, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once made a speech where he stated ‘no-one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather both are processes that continually evolve’ and I think that this statement is fairly apt in context of electoral activities in the DRC. When the Congolese people went to the polls on 30 July and again on 29 October 2006, a new democracy was born, and I hope that this signals the end to conflict in the DRC. Although this is the start of the democratic process in the country, this process must be allowed to continually evolve over the coming months and years.

I think it is essential that we recognise the magnitude of the electoral challenge presented by the DRC. The country is approximately the size of Western Europe yet has a population of around 57million people, smaller than that of the United Kingdom. Further, outside of the major towns and cities, there is very little infrastructure, the country as a whole barely has 300miles of paved roads. Even the challenge posed by the huge urban sprawl of Kinshasa, a city with a population bigger than that of neighbouring Republic of Congo, itself is no small task. Baring all of this in mind, I think it is possible to see the challenges presented just by the sheer logistics of the operation. Further, I think we must also bare in mind that this is the first free, fair and secret electoral ballot since the country gained its independence some 46 years ago. In this respect the conduct and dedication of the electorate, and indeed the candidates, is highly applaudable. I also would like to recognise the contribution

played by the many agencies and characters involved in organising the election, the CEI with their sponsors and international partners in addition to MONUC and the many other agencies working in the DRC. Their work and contribution is most commendable considering the volatile and sometimes out right dangerous environment in which they often operate.

Through my own observations and hearing the views of other national observers in the UNA-DRC team on the Election Days itself I believe that the election was sufficiently free, fair and secret to be proclaimed valid. I would urge all parties in the DRC to respect the result of this election once it is announce – expected 19 November 2006. Although today I hear of violent armed clashes between troops loyal to each of the presidential candidates, peace is an essential precursor to the announcement on the result and I urge calm from all parties. For the sake of all the Congolese people, I sincerely hope that these isolated incidents of violence do not spread throughout the country and jeopardise the prospects of electoral success. As all, I eagerly await the result of the elections, and wish all the parties in the DRC the best of luck for the future of their country. After so many years of bitter dictatorship, kleptocracy and brutal conflict, surely the people of the DRC deserve a peaceful and sustainable outlook.

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November 2006

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Annex

Result from Polling Station 1049E (CV) at the Institut Kimvula in Commune de Kintambo, Kinshasa.

1. Nombre d'électeurs:	360
2. Emargement:	212
3. Vote par dérogation:	12
4. Vote par omission:	0
5. Nombre de votant:	224
6. Bulletins non utilisés:	186
7. Bulletins nuls:	0
8. Bulletins blancs:	0
9. Suffrage calablement exprime:	224
10. Bulletins recus:	
Presidentiels:	410
Provinciales:	405

Presidentiels:

- Jean-Pierre Bemba: 160
- Joseph Kabila: 64