Country Profile: Democratic Republic of the Congo

A country with vast economic resources, for years the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) has been embroiled with violence and the threat still remains.

HISTORY

After independence in 1960, the country immediately faced an army mutiny and an attempt at secession by its mineral-rich province of Katanga. A year later, its prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, was seized and killed by troops loyal to army Chief Joseph Mobutu. In 1965 Mobutu seized power renaming the country Zaire. Zaire was turned into a springboard for operations against Soviet-backed Angola and thereby ensured US backing; however, he also made Zaire synonymous with corruption. After the Cold War, Zaire ceased to be of interest to the US. In 1997 neighbouring Rwanda invaded it to flush out extremist Hutu militias, this gave a boost to the anti-Mobutu rebels, who quickly captured the capital, Kinshasa, installed Laurent Kabila as president and renamed the country DR Congo. DR Congo's troubles continued with a rift between Mr. Kabila and his former allies sparking a new rebellion, backed by Rwanda and Uganda. Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe took Kabila's side, turning the country into a vast battleground. Despite coup attempts and sporadic violence a fragile peace has held since the formal end of the war. But, the Kinshasa government has no control over large parts of the country and tension remains high.

RECENT SITUATION

The five-year conflict pitted government forces, supported by Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, against rebels backed by Uganda and Rwanda. Despite a peace deal and the formation of a transitional government in 2003, the threat of civil war remains. The war claimed an estimated three million lives, either as a direct result of fighting or because of disease and malnutrition. The war had an economic as well as a political side as fighting was fuelled by the country's vast mineral wealth. All sides took advantage of the natural resources. The lot of DR Congo's citizens is little improved. The Crisis Group, said in 2005 that 1,000 people were dying every day from war-related causes, including disease, hunger and violence. With the help of the world's largest and most expensive peacekeeping operation, MONUC, the country overcame major logistic and political challenges to hold its first free and fair elections in 40 years in July 2006. However, the country faces continued challenges including the creation of state institutions that are accountable to the Congolese people and the construction of an integrated and professional army that protects civilians rather than abuses them.

FACTS

- **Full name:** Democratic Republic of the Congo
- **Population:** 62.6 Million (UN 2007)
- **Capital:** Kinshasa
- **Area**: 2.34 million sq km (905,354 sq miles)
- **Internet domain:** .cd
- **International dialling code:** +243
- **Major religion:** Christianity, Islam
- **Major languages:** French, Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo, Tshiluba
- **HDI value*[1]:** 176. D R Congo 0.389 [1. Norway (0.971)] (2009)
- **Human Poverty Index (HPI-1)*[2]:** 176. D R Congo (38) [21. UK] (2007)
- **Probability of not surviving past 40 (%):** 30.1%
- **Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births):** 161 (UNICEF 2009)
- **HIV prevalence (% aged 15-49):** 5.3 [3.3–7.5] (2005)
- **Life expectancy at birth (years) :** 46 (UNICEF 2007)

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Education

- **Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%):**
  - 144. D R Congo (51.4) [1. Australia (113.0)] (2005)
- **Adult Literacy Rate: (% ages 15 and older):** 67. D R Congo (UNICEF 2009)

Economy and Trade

- **GDP per capita:** No. of people lived below the national poverty line. (PPP US$):
  - 153. D R Congo (1,262) [1. Luxembourg (60,228)] (2005)
- **GNI Per Capita:** US $120 (World Bank, 2006)
- **Gini Coefficient *[3]:** D R Congo (n/a) [126. Denmark (24.7)] (2007)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Congolese franc = 100 centimes.
- **Main exports:** Diamonds, copper, coffee, cobalt, crude oil.
- **CO_2 emissions share of world total (%):** 3.5 (2004) [1.2 (1990)]

Water, sanitation and nutritional status

- **People without access to an improved water source (%):** 54 (UNICEF 2006)
- **Population using improved sanitation (%):** 31 (2006) [n/a (1990)]
- **Population Undernourished (% of total population):** 33 (2002-2004) [54 (1990-1992)]

Politics

- **Government:** People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy.
- **President:** Joseph Kabila
  - Kabila led a coalition comprising 30 parties called the Alliance for the Presidential Majority (AMP). The coalition pledged to rebuild the country and promote national reconciliation.
- **Year Women received right to vote:** 1947, 1961
- **Internally displaced people (thousands, 2006):**

*[1] The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income).

*[2] The Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1), focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the HDI.

*[3] The **Gini coefficient** is most prominently used as a measure of inequality of wealth distribution. A value of 0 represents absolute equality, and a value of 100 absolute inequality.

*[4] Rankings are out of a total of 177.

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