

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO ELECTORAL PROCESS

Over the last decade, the leadership of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has worked to build an inclusive, transparent and democratic government that can provide a better future for all citizens. Having emerged from conflict under the leadership of President Joseph Kabila, the Congolese people have taken critical steps in pursuing democratic aspirations guided by the DRC's Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and religion.

In the past year, the DRC government has welcomed interest from the international community in its preparations to successfully complete planned local, provincial, parliamentary and presidential elections, which are essential to the strengthening of our democratic government. Despite technical and logistical constraints, the DRC government has remained committed to the timely conduct of these elections, as demonstrated by actions that have earned support from Congolese civil society groups, the African Union, European Union and United Nations. Key milestones achieved along the DRC's path toward free, fair and peaceful elections have included:

- **In February 2015, the DRC's Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) issued an electoral calendar** establishing a timeline of activities to be completed in preparation for several elections, including for president. Some activities were dependent on certain political decisions, including those regarding voter eligibility, the allocation of funds and legal authorities conveyed by parliament. The U.S. Department of State commended the release of this calendar for demonstrating the DRC's commitment to holding free and fair elections.
- **In May 2015, President Kabila called on all political parties and civil society institutions to join in a national dialogue** focused on creating an environment for a peaceful electoral process. He noted that the internationally-supported dialogue, to include members of a variety of political parties and branches of government as well as civil society, should focus on the establishment of a consensus-based electoral timetable and update of the voter rolls, the financing of elections and security measures that need to be implemented to ensure a peaceful election process.
 - **Following his May 2015 announcement, President Kabila met with key stakeholders from all parts of Congolese society** for consultations on the principal objectives for the national dialogue. Participants included religious leaders, civic representatives and provincial governors as well as members of the foreign diplomatic community.
- **On August 25, 2015, President Kabila promulgated Parliament-approved legislation to move forward with the country's first-ever local elections**, demonstrating the government's commitment to upholding the electoral timeline set forward by the CENI.
- **On October 5, 2015, President Kabila met with leaders of his majority party to reaffirm his commitment to uphold the Constitution for upcoming elections.** He also asked party leaders to join him in pursuing a national dialogue on these elections to ensure the process is fair, free and transparent.
- **On December 14, 2015, President Kabila delivered his annual State of the Nation address to the people of the DRC and reiterated his call for broad public involvement in the national**

political dialogue in order to ensure a peaceful electoral cycle. He said, “It is not through violence that we will address our differences. Our solutions will come neither from the United Nations, nor from foreign countries in the East or the West but from ourselves and via a dialogue among Congolese who are self determined and responsible for their own future.”

- **Since December, key domestic, foreign and multilateral institutions have expressed support for a national dialogue:**
 - **On December 24, 2015, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon** reported to the Security Council that he encouraged President Kabila and the DRC government to “intensify their engagement with stakeholders across the political spectrum.” The Secretary-General also urged all Congolese stakeholders to “commit to resolving their differences through dialogue and consultation.”
 - **On January 4, 2016, the leadership of the Congo National Episcopal Conference** called for a dialogue and announced the formation of a special committee tasked with maintaining contact with relevant political parties, to encourage mutual trust and advance initiatives aimed at launching the electoral process.
 - **On January 14, 2016, United Nations Special Representative for the DRC Maman Sidikou** reported to the UN Security Council that during recent meetings with President Kabila, “I have expressed MONUSCO's readiness to support an inclusive Congolese process guided by the Constitution.”
 - **Also on January 14, 2016, African Union Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma** issued a statement strongly supporting the DRC’s national dialogue as “the only way to address the numerous challenges faced by the country and to consolidate national unity and cohesion.”
 - **On February 16, 2016, the United Nations, African Union, European Union and the International Organisation of La Francophonie** issued a joint statement that underscored the necessity of an inclusive political dialogue in the DRC.
- **On February 10, 2016, the CENI announced that the DRC government had allocated an initial US\$300 million to the commission for electoral preparations in 2016**, allowing steps to be taken — including issuing a tender for voter enrollment kits and logistical materials — that advance the electoral process but do not preempt decisions that would come from a national dialogue.
- **In a March 30, 2016 resolution, the United Nations Security Council** called on all stakeholders in the DRC “to engage into an open and inclusive political dialogue over the holding of presidential elections.”
- **On April 6, 2016, the African Union appointed former Togolese Prime Minister Edem Kodjo to facilitate a national dialogue for the upcoming elections**, following President Kabila’s invitation for the institution to participate in this manner.

- **On April 11, 2016, Chairman Etienne Tshisekedi of the opposition party Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS)** announced his party's intention to work with Prime Minister Kodjo to achieve consensus on the proposed national dialogue.
- **On April 27, 2016, Minister of State for the Budget Michel Bongongo announced that the government would allocate to the CENI a new tranche of US\$30 million** for ongoing election preparations, noting that "Whatever difficulties we have, the government absolutely wants the CENI to have the necessary means to organize these elections."
- **On June 6, 2016, the United Nations, African Union, European Union and the International Organisation of La Francophonie** issued a joint statement reiterating the crucial importance of holding a political dialogue leading to a consensus that would allow for free, fair, transparent and credible elections, announcing that they will establish a support group to mobilize expertise and resources in support of such a dialogue, and urging all Congolese actors to join the dialogue.