



# MONUSCO AND DRC ELECTIONS

*With current volatility over elections in Democratic Republic of the Congo, this paper provides background on the challenges and forewarns of MONUSCO's inability to quell large scale electoral violence due to financial and logistical constraints. By Chandrima Das, Director of Peacekeeping Policy, UN Foundation.*

## OVERVIEW

The UN Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known by the acronym "MONUSCO," is critical to supporting peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). MONUSCO battles back militias, holds parties accountable to the peace agreement, and works to ensure political stability. **Presidential elections were set to take place on December 23 of this year, after two years of delay. While they may be delayed further, due to repressive tactics by the government, the potential for electoral violence and fraud is high.** In addition, due to MONUSCO's capacity restraints, the mission will not be able to protect civilians if large scale electoral violence occurs. MONUSCO is helping the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), the group responsible for executing the elections. The UN has worked to provide technical support and promote women's participation in the election. **But unlike the elections in 2006 and 2011, the Congolese government has substantially scaled back the UN's support.** The Congolese govern-

ment is asserting their authority and are ready to demonstrate their ability to hold credible elections. DRC President Joseph Kabila stated during the UN General Assembly high-level week in September 2018: "I now reaffirm the irreversible nature of our decision to hold the elections as planned at the end of this year. Everything will be done in order to ensure that these elections are peaceful and credible."

MONUSCO has worked to train security services across the country to minimize excessive use of force during protests and demonstrations. **However, MONUSCO troops are spread thin across the entire country, with less than 1,000 UN Peacekeepers deployed to the capital of Kinshasa, which has a population of 9.5 million people.** The mission does not have the capacity to address large-scale violence, especially if it extends to urban areas. This responsibility remains with the DRC government.

## SETTING THE SCENE

**On December 23, 2018 forty million Congolese citizens are slated to elect a new President. If the elections proceed as planned, this will be the first peaceful transfer of power since the country's independence six decades ago.** The current President, Joseph Kabila, attempted to seek a third term, despite the Constitution preventing this, but eventually gave up his pursuit. Kabila has been in office since 2001 after his father, then-President Laurent Kabila, was assassinated. Kabila is accused of using his power to enrich himself and loyalists around him. President Kabila throughout the years has consolidated power, marginalized opposition voices, restricted freedom of speech and media, and used his security forces to commit atrocities and create instability throughout the country.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly recently passed laws granting immunity to past presidents for any crimes committed during office. The Assembly also agreed to provide housing and security for former Presidents.

Three candidates are vying for the Presidency. President Kabila has thrown his support for president behind Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, the former Interior Minister and Secretary-General of Kabila's People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD). Critics argue Shadary was chosen to protect Kabila and those that have benefited from his corruption. Shadary is a Kabila loyalist, with little international support or recognition, and meager finances. He has been sanctioned by the European Union for his part in oppressing anti-government protests.

Several opposition groups recently united around Martin Fayulu, who worked for Exxon-Mobil for two decades and was educated in France and the United States. Fayulu has been a vociferous critic of Kabila and participated in anti-government demonstrations. He has support

from former Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba and business tycoon, Moise Katumbi.

Another set of opposition groups are supporting Felix Tshisekedi and Vital Karmehé. Karmehé is a longtime Congolese politician, who ran and lost against Kabila in 2011. Tshisekedi lacks political experience but is using the legacy of his deceased father Etienne Tshisekedi, who was an opposition leader over the last two decades. Tshisekedi promised to Karmehé that if he wins, he would make him Prime Minister.

## MONUSCO BACKGROUND

In 1999, after decades of war and political unrest, the UN Security Council (UNSC) authorized a UN Peacekeeping mission to deploy to DRC, following the second African World War which involved nine countries and over two dozen armed groups, resulting in the deaths of 5 million people. In 2013, the UNSC created a specialized force called the Forward Intervention Brigade (FIB) as part of MONUSCO—a first for UN Peacekeeping—to carry out targeted offensive operations against rebel groups in eastern Congo, including the M23 armed group which overtook the city of Goma in eastern DRC. The FIB is composed of 3,000 troops and operates under the direct command of MONUSCO. After the defeat of the M23 in eastern Congo in November 2013, the FIB continues to address other armed groups operating in the region that pose a significant threat to civilians, specifically the Ugandan Islamist Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed group which has killed hundreds of innocent Congolese in the region. In November 2018, MONUSCO launched an operation against the ADF that led to the death of eight peacekeepers, and several Congolese soldiers. This is the second brutal attack in a year by the ADF that killed blue helmets. In December 2017, MONUSCO lost 15 peacekeepers and over fifty were wounded, which is the worst



attack in MONUSCO history.

Currently, there are less than 15,000 UN Peacekeepers (including civilians, police, and military) deployed to DRC, a country that is three times the size of Afghanistan, with less than 15 percent of the U.S. coalition troops during the height of the conflict.

## ELECTION SUPPORT

The Security Council mandated that MONUSCO monitor and support the election. The government actively rejected MONUSCO's assistance for the elections including obstructing the force from receiving the necessary equipment to operate in the country. While this has been resolved due to high-level negotiations with the DRC government, it highlights the government's reluctance for UN support. **The UN's election plan focuses on preventive action and internal crisis management, which involves enhanced deterrence efforts, human rights monitoring and reporting, as well as national police training to combat potential election-related violence.** So far, MONUSCO police forces have trained 4,600 Congolese Police officers on crowd control and response to human rights violations to minimize the potential use of excessive force during protests and public demonstrations.

**MONUSCO has 59 Standing Combat Deployments across the country which facilitates civilians teams that meet with communities and prevent outbreaks of electoral violence.** MONUSCO is providing technical assistance to over two-thirds of the DRC's 26 provinces by advising CENI on housing election materials, training members on data management, and providing training material and implementing training for poll staff. In addition, MONUSCO strengthened its mobile monitoring and response teams to respond to threats of violence. **Through this coordinated effort, these teams will gather information, provide analysis, and feed into an**

**early warning system that will hopefully deter some electoral violence.**

In preparation for the elections, UN Peacekeepers are deployed to four areas: a battalion in Kinshasa (west); Kasai (center of the country); a small battalion of less than 1,000 troops in Tanganyika and the rest of the force in near Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu, where most of the armed groups are located. In total, there are five Rapidly Deployable Battalions, including in Kasai and Tanganyika, that can deploy to rural areas quickly if there is an escalation of violence. **MONUSCO has determined that if large-scale electoral violence spreads in any of the major cities, Kinshasa, Goma, Lubumbashi, and Kinsangani, the peacekeeping force will not be able to address the violence.** If the security situation deteriorates across the country including in the Equateur and Nord and Sud Ubungu provinces which have no MONUSCO presence, this could be detrimental to the humanitarian situation. MONUSCO is already challenged in implementing its civilian protection mandate with its existing resources. **It will be unable to respond to threats to civilians across the country if the security situation declines sharply due to the election.**

## CHALLENGES & CONCERNS

The Congo Research Group has documented that the government led by President Kabila, the parliament, and CENI were responsible for the elections delays. The government has delayed the election calendar and the disbursement of the election budget to each of the country's 26 provinces. They have also slowed the political negotiations and refused technical support from the international community.

In addition, CENI voter rolls could have more than 7 million potential fraudulent voters. CENI has been unwilling to investigate or audit the voter rolls to verify the citizenship of the voters.

In addition, in both the 2006 and 2011 presidential elections, CENI allowed voters to vote outside of their polling station, which could have led to millions of fraudulent votes. The opposition party, the Catholic Church, and several civil society organizations are on record voicing concerns about the electronic voting machines and their susceptibility to manipulation. The government remains committed to using them.

Political oppression continues less than a month from the elections. Human Rights Watch has reported that over 2,000 journalists, political activists, and demonstrators have been detained across the country over the past three years. Many of these prisoners have experienced torture and civil society leaders have been threatened.

Furthermore, insecurity persists across the country with recent violence in Kasai in the south and in the Ituri provinces in the east. Humanitarian needs have risen in 2018: over 12.8 million people are in need of aid; 7.7 million face severe food insecurity; 4.5 million people are displaced; and a fast spreading Ebola outbreak is threatening the country.

Despite these challenging circumstances, the government is committed to moving the elections forward which could incite electoral violence in the lead up or near after the elections. MONUSCO has prepared within its resource and capacity constraints, however, it will not be able quell large scale political unrest and violence across the country. The leadership within the UN has worked to keep the channels with the government open and hope the elections will be free, fair, and credible and respect the will of the people. However, longtime Congo watcher, Ida Sawyer of Human Rights Watch warns, "Scheduling elections without Kabila running does not mean that the violence will end or the elections will be credible."

