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**Governance Crisis and Conflict  
in the  
Democratic Republic of Congo**

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## **Resume**

*Seema Shekhawat* holds a doctoral degree in Political Science from the University of Jammu, India. Her areas of interests include conflict, human rights and gender. She has published extensively on these issues in national and international journals, magazines and newspapers besides authoring three books (two co-authored). Earlier Dr. Shekhawat was associated with University of Jammu and was the sub-editor of *Across LOC* newsletter. Currently, she is a research associate at Centre for African Studies, University of Mumbai.

## **Introduction**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with an area of 2.3m sq/km, is a giant of sub-Saharan Africa, bordering nine other countries. It is situated at the heart of the west-central part of sub-Saharan Africa, and is surrounded by Angola, the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania across Lake Tanganyika and Zambia. DRC was formerly referred to as Congo Free State, Belgian Congo, Congo-Léopoldville, Congo-Kinshasa and Zaire.

The country has enormous mineral wealth – copper, diamond, gold, cobalt, etc., and potentially large reserves of oil and natural gas. Paradoxically, this resource rich country is also the site of one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The conflicts of 1996 and 1998 have resulted in massive disruption of the social, political and economic fabric of the country.<sup>1</sup> For over a decade the country has been mired in conflict with devastating effects on its civilian population. The conflict in the DRC is one of the most staggering conflicts in international politics. The medley of treaties and negotiations notwithstanding, the conflict continues with varied intensity. Though the parties involved in the conflict have their own perspective regarding the cause and course of conflict, no one can deny that the region is in dire need of peace as well as sustainable development to break the 'conflict trap' that has brought miseries for all the conflict-ridden countries of the world including the ones in African continent.<sup>2</sup>

The costs of the conflict are self-evident. Besides death and destruction, large-scale displacement is an integral part of the conflict. Other humanitarian costs include negative impact on women and other vulnerable groups, and there has been a noticeable increase in the post-trauma stress syndrome and the resultant psychiatric problems for the victims. The economic costs of the conflict cannot be confined to a particular sector of industry or investment prospects. It has affected the important sources of livelihood of the local people. Besides exacting extensive damage to the infrastructure of the region the violent conflict has discouraged private investment and pushed the economy towards stagnation. It is like a vicious circle in which violence has led to underdevelopment and vice versa. The common people caught in this vicious circle have suffered the most.

The country emerged from what has been called ‘Africa’s First World War’, due to indulgence of many neighbouring countries in the conflict, in 2003 with the establishment of a transitional government. The war has come to a halt but has given way to several local conflicts. Amidst the conflict scenario, the country reportedly held its first free and fair elections since independence in July 2006. The current situation continues to be dismal with the rising cost of the violent conflict; in terms of death and destruction, disease, malnutrition, mass displacement ever rising. Militia groups as well as government troops have treated the civilians caught in the conflict as easy victims for. The humanitarian crisis in the DRC is among the most complex, deadly and prolonged as the numbers of displaced persons, sexual crimes, mutilations and summary executions have been of a staggering magnitude.

This paper argues that the conflict in the DRC can largely be attributed to misgovernance and the consequent lack of democracy since its independence. The misgovernance resulted in inequitable distribution of resources, corruption, human rights violations under authoritarian regimes and thus stoked discontent among the people. This grim scenario created a vicious circle in which bad governance practices fed to a conflict situation, which in turn fuelled misgovernance. The paper argues that since a democratically elected government is in place, the current environment needs to be used to promote good governance and sustainable development of the conflict torn country. Recent studies have shown a close link between conflict and the failure of state institutions and it is estimated that almost half of the countries that emerge from conflict return to chaos within less than a decade. There is a strong correlation between this recidivism and misgovernance. A combination of democracy and international pressure is needed to address Congo’s deep-seated governance problems and prevent it from degenerating into an unmanageable chaos.

## **Dawn of Independence**

DRC was a colony of Belgium. King Leopold II of Belgium named it the Congo Free State after acquiring the territory formally in 1885. In 1908, the Belgian parliament took over the Free State from Leopold following international pressure. From then on, it became the Belgian Congo, under the rule of the elected Belgian government. The country became independent on 30 June 1960 but mutiny and secessionist movements marred the post-independence era.

Earlier in May 1960, Patrice Lumumba led Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) won the parliamentary elections. Lumumba became the Prime Minister and Joseph Kasavubu, of the ABAKO (Alliance des Bakongo) was elected President. To quote MacNulty: “Unlike Africa’s other major colonial powers Britain and France, Belgium had done little to promote a local elite to govern on its behalf and assume the reins of state power. As a result, there was not the smooth transition to Western-favoured regimes which largely characterized independence elsewhere; instead, the Congo began rapidly to implode, the new administration faced with mutiny and multiple secessions which foreign interests did much to foment.”<sup>3</sup>

The problem got aggravated with the fact that the cold war era brought the fight between Soviet Union and US to the country. The Soviet Union supported Lumumba as the legitimate leader of the country and the US challenged it. The resource rich country also could not get economic freedom with powerful outsiders that continue to keep control on the economy of the country. To quote MacGaffey, “the colonial African elite thus lacked education, administrative and managerial experience, and wealth. At independence, the Belgians handed over political but not economic control, so that the new dominant class based its power on control of the state, while ownership of the economy remained in the hands of the big foreign mining and plantation companies.”<sup>4</sup> The overall scenario culminated into a political crisis. Kasavubu and Lumumba got engaged in a power struggle and later Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba in September 1960.

### **The Mobutu Era and First Congo Conflict**

Following years of extreme instability, Lieutenant General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, ousted both President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Tshombe in 1965 coup. The Congolese state and economy still bear the deep impact of Mobutu's 'predatory' rule of thirty-two years. Executive power in Zaire, a name given to the DRC by Mobutu, was absolute. The 1974 constitution granted him authority over the executive, legislature and judiciary. Mobutu, the head of the state, also had the right to change the constitution at his discretion. He banned political parties while making membership in his party, the Popular Revolutionary Movement, compulsory.

In the name of democracy a one-party system was established wherein elections were held periodically, with the incumbent head of the state as the only candidate. Mobutu was also guilty of severe human rights violations and political repression. Corruption was integral to the system, and politicians became entirely dependent on his good will. He consolidated power by co-opting potential rivals and exploited the country's vast natural resources. By the 1990s, the country's economy was near collapse due to mismanagement, corruption and authoritarianism. This overall dismal scenario and the later happenings in the DRC gave credibility to the stance that conflicts in Africa, including the one in the DRC, are due to 'bad governance.'<sup>5</sup>

Bad governance within the state accompanied by the external dimension i.e. the Rwandan genocide of 1994 laid the foundation of conflict in the DRC. Some of the militias responsible for killing thousands of Tutsis in Rwanda fled across the border to the DRC. Rwanda wanted DRC to check these militias and sent its own troops twice to stop preparation of attacks on the country. The Allied Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire, AFDL) under the leadership of Laurent Kabila and backed by Rwanda and Uganda ousted Mobutu in May 1997. The ascendancy of Kabila led to the end of first conflict.

### **Kabila Regime and the Second Congo Conflict**

The situation however could not remain stable for a long period with differences between Kabila and the neighbouring allies, which continued their presence in the DRC, and led to a no compromise situation.<sup>6</sup> Internally, good governance remained an unfulfilled dream for the people despite all the euphoria regarding the change that was expected. There was disappointment at the popular level as the government behaved in an authoritarian manner and reneged on its promise and did not provide a genuine democracy and combating corruption.<sup>7</sup> The rule of Kabila was, thus, similar in many ways to his predecessor. He banned political activities, dissolved parliament and suppressed all local bodies. There was no state budget between 1998 and 2001. Laws were issued by presidential decree. Collaboration ended with international financial institutions since they were pressing him to investigate massacres that took place during the conflict. Kabila, just like his predecessor Mobutu, encouraged favouritism and nepotism. Poor monetary policy led to a near economic collapse.

The internal and external factors colluded and pushed the country towards a Second Congo War, the world's deadliest conflict since World War II in August 1998. From 1998 to 2003 the country suffered hugely with fighting between the Congolese government supported by Angola, Chad, Sudan, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and on the other side Congolese rebels backed by Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. Many other militia groups that claimed to be defender groups for their community also became active participants in the conflict. A cease-fire agreement in 1999 and deployment of the UN peacekeeping force in 2000 notwithstanding, the violent conflict continued.

### **Peace and Democratic Attempts**

In January 2001, President Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated and his son, Joseph Kabila, took over. In 2001, the Inter-Congolese dialogue was initiated to set the stage for peace and democracy. In April 2003, the Pretoria Peace agreement paved way for the installation of a transitional government with the aim of reunification, pacification, and reconstruction of the country, the restoration of territorial integrity and the re-establishment of the authority of the state throughout the national territory.<sup>8</sup> On 18 July 2003, the Transitional Government came into being. A new constitution was adopted on



13 May 2005. Elections were held in 2006. Joseph Kabila was elected the President, and in February 2007 a new government was formed. Despite all these laudable events the violent activities did not come to a complete halt. The Eastern provinces, specifically the Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Katanga remained unstable while rebel groups continued to fight among themselves and with the government.<sup>9</sup>

Optimism for a permanent peace came after the Goma agreement was signed on 23 January 2008. However, the non-inclusion of the FDLR ((Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda) in the January 2008 talks and the government's pledge to disarm the rebels has cast doubt over the prospects of permanent peace. In Ituri, the risk of renewed violence is limited by the presence of the MONUC (United National Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo), the dismantling of the majority of armed groups and the local population's war weariness. However, the success of Congo's reconstruction would depend on effective ways to address the persisting root causes of the conflict –unequal access to land and unfair sharing of revenues from natural resource exploitation.<sup>10</sup>

The crisis in Congo thus is essentially an outcome of authoritarianism, foreign interference, misgovernance and lack of democracy. Since independence in 1960, continuous inter-ethnic and civil strife, authoritarian rule, etc have ravaged the country. To quote an ICG report, “The erosion and collapse of state institutions was a proximate cause of the Congo's two wars between 1996-1997 and 1998-2003. By the time Rwanda invaded in 1996, President Mobutu Sese Seko's abusive government had undermined the army, administration, parliament and court that the local population greeted the Rwandan-backed rebels with euphoria. However, the new government of President Laurent Kabila was similar in many ways, and state institutions remained weak and corrupt. In the east, rebel movements established ad hoc administrative structures bent on extracting natural resources and taxes. The country was essentially divided into large fiefdoms ruled by military movements.”<sup>11</sup>

## **The Consequences**

### ***Killings and Displacement***

The people of the DRC have suffered immensely throughout the colonial times and in the post-independence era. The continuation of exploitative colonial legacy by the leaders of the independent DRC brought a trail of death, destruction and underdevelopment for the people. The ongoing conflicts have aggravated the situation. It has claimed numerous lives and plunged the resource rich country into chaos and acute underdevelopment. A glimpse of the humane cost of the conflict can be gauged by the following facts: “On August 27, 1998, just a few days after the beginning of the civil war, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service reported that rebels and their Rwandan and Ugandan allies killed 200 civilians in Kassika in South Kivu. This was one of the first mass killings, called ‘the massacre of Kassika.’ Later, 818 other civilians were killed in ‘the massacre of Makobola’ in the town of Makobola. Their houses were burnt and almost at the same time fifteen women were buried alive in Kamituga. As early as February 1999, thirty people were killed at Kilambo in North Kivu by the Rassemblement des Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), backed by the Rwandan army. RCD rebels and the Rwandan soldiers and militias tied up men, raped women in front of their sons and husbands, and killed them. In May the same year, the RCD with its Rwandan allies killed at least thirty villagers in Katogota, south Kivu (Human Rights Watch 2001). In late 1999, the RCD with their allies sexually tortured and buried many women alive in Mwenga (Association Africaine de Défenses des Droits de l’Homme, ASADHO 2000).”<sup>12</sup>

United Nations in March 2005 described the crisis in Eastern Congo, as the ‘world’s worst humanitarian crisis.’ Since 2000, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has documented the humanitarian impact of conflict through mortality surveys. The first four studies, conducted between 2000 and 2004, estimated that 3.9 million people had died since 1998. About 10 per cent of all the deaths were due to violence and 90 per cent were due to diseases like malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia and malnutrition. The fifth survey, covering the period from January 2006 to April 2007, concluded that 5.4 million deaths have occurred between August 1998 and April 2007, with as many as 45,000 people dying every month. As with previous IRC studies in the DRC, the majority of deaths

have been due to infectious diseases, malnutrition and maternity related problems. In June 2007, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs put the figures of internally displaced persons at 1.16 million. The UNHCR put the figures for Congolese refugees in the neighbouring countries of Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda at 310,000 in October 2007.

A Human Rights Watch report has accused DRC 's neighbouring countries, of committing abuses both economically as well as physically. To quote the report, "while Ugandan commanders were plundering gold, looting timber, exporting coffee, and controlling illicit trade monopolies in the Ituri district, their troops were killing and otherwise abusing the local population. Without international pressure, the situation can only get worse."<sup>13</sup> The security forces of the DRC as well as rebel groups too have been accused of committing crimes against humanity- killing, looting, torturing and raping women.

### ***Impact on Women***

The troubled situation has made the life of women more precarious. Besides getting killed and injured, hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been raped in the country. There are at least 40,000 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC according to a report of the World Health Organization published in 2005. According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence, Yakin Ertürk, who toured eastern Congo in July 2007, violence against women in North and South Kivu included 'unimaginable brutality.' All armed forces involved in the conflict are guilty of sexual crimes.<sup>14</sup> Cases of making women sexual slaves and thereafter the inhuman behaviour of the captivators too were reported from the country. To quote, "Most victims, as ever, are women and girls, some no more than toddlers, though men and boys have sometimes been targeted too. Local aid workers and UN reports inform of gang rapes, leaving victims with appalling physical and psychological injuries; rapes committed in front of families or whole communities; male relatives forced at gunpoint to rape their own daughters, mothers or sisters; women used as sex slaves were forced to eat

excrement or the flesh of murdered relatives. Some women victims have been murdered by bullets fired from a gun barrel shoved into their vagina.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***Economic Implications***

The conflicts have dramatically reduced national output and government revenue, and increased external debt. Foreign business houses have curtailed operations due to an uncertain atmosphere, lack of infrastructure, and a non conducive and difficult work environment. There has been an increase in unemployment. A country rich in natural resources has become one of the least developed countries. The infrastructure in terms of road density, electrification and water supply remains poor. The country is the world’s largest producer of cobalt, and a major producer of copper and diamond but the resources of the country have been a curse and brought misfortunes for the natives and all the benefits have gone to the outsiders. Resources have been used to fuel conflict and not to get people out of poverty. In 2007, the Human Development Index ranked the country at 168 position out of a total of 177 countries.

The unstable situation has provided a fertile ground to the stakeholders to exploit the natural wealth of DRC with impunity. As Reyntjens wrote, “Entrepreneurs of insecurity are engaged in extractive activities that would be impossible in a stable state environment. The criminalization context in which these activities occur offers avenues for considerable factional and personal enrichment through the trafficking of arms, illegal drugs, toxic products, mineral resources and dirty money.”<sup>16</sup> A United Nations report published in April 2001 clearly pointed that all the parties involved in the conflict profited by looting resources of DRC. The overall situation hence remains fragile and poverty is all pervasive. The words of Jan Egeland, the then United Nations Under-Secretary General for humanitarian affairs are worth quoting: “there are few places on earth where the gap between humanitarian needs and available resources is as large - or as lethal - as in Congo.”<sup>17</sup>

The DRC is emerging from a decade of political instability and violent conflict that has led to the near-collapse of the economy, and caused the annual per capita income to

plummet to \$120 in 2005 (down from \$380 in 1985). Experts have described this as ‘development in reverse.’ The country has the second largest swath of rainforests in the world. With 86 million hectares of area covered by rainforests, the DRC accounts for over half of the total remaining rainforests in the Central Africa region. Congolese forests are a vital resource, both for the Congolese people and the global environment. About 40 million rural Congolese depend on the forests for their food, income, energy, shelter, medicines and cultural needs. Described as the ‘second lung’ of the planet for their ability to store carbon dioxide on a global scale, these Congolese forests too have been threatened by widespread poverty and instability in the region.<sup>18</sup>

The United Nations peace-keeping forces too have been accused of adding to the woes of the people. An internal United Nations report - obtained by the BBC - reveals ‘widespread and inherent corruption’ pervading the procurement department in Kinshasa, the capital of DRC. According to a 2007 report of the Human Rights Watch from December 2004 to August 2006, around 140 allegations of sexual exploitation involving United Nations personnel were recorded in Congo. A BBC report accused United Nations troops have been involved in arming militia groups and smuggling gold and ivory. Earlier the peacekeepers in the DRC were also accused of perpetrating widespread abuse of refugees and indulging in sexual violence.

### **Attempts for Reforms**

As discussed earlier the internal political and economic conditions in the DRC remained quite problematic. The external dimension wherein the neighbouring countries continued interfering in the internal affairs too played a key determinant in keeping the situation violent. The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) sponsored by the international financial institutions too were not good for the country. Thus, the problems of the DRC are also linked to the fall of the economic system aided by the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. Many aspects of the economic and social realities in the DRC were not taken into account in implementing the SAP. The DRC received aid in the form of their first structural adjustment loan of \$27 million in 1976. The SAP was supposed to help push developing countries into industrialization by

supplying short-term loans and technical support, but the opposite happened in the DRC. Long-term debt in the DRC was \$2,900 million in 1977 and it swelled to \$23.7 billion in 1987. Debt overhang became so huge that the IMF had to put a halt to financial aid to the DRC in 1990. The process of change has begun and it is hoped that the internal and external collective efforts would pave the way for democracy, sustainable development and peace in the DRC.

### ***Internal Scenario***

After taking over in 2001 Joseph Kabila launched an era of reforms and relative growth alongside the attempts for peace. Donors re-engaged and sponsored a stabilization plan that included new investment, mining and forestry codes and reformed fiscal and monetary policies to cut inflation and boost revenue. The GDP growth was 7 per cent in 2005, while national revenues tripled between 2000 and 2005. These reforms have been coupled with an increase in aid, which in 2006 amounted to 56 per cent of the national budget.

In 2006 Kabila's elections campaign programme included:

- Peace and democracy in harmony with neighbouring countries and International Community
- Economic liberalization
- Human Rights
- A country safer from Regional terrorism

Though the promises are yet not fulfilled, there are concrete steps the elected government has undertaken. First, the government has announced a programme of political and administrative decentralization to bring the state authority closer to the people and for an equitable sharing of the nation's revenue between the centre and the provinces. Secondly, it also plans to hold local elections. Third, the government is taking steps to translate the cease-fire into lasting peace. All these steps need political will on the part of the leaders as well as all other parties involved in the conflict.

### *External Efforts*

The country joined the World Bank in 1963. Since then, World Bank assistance on 82 projects has helped the country work towards achieving improved governance, economic growth and a reduction in poverty. However, as is evident from the political history of the country, the achievement of these valuable goals remained a distant reality. As of October 2007, there were nine active World Bank projects with a value of approximately US\$1.9 billion in the DRC. These include:<sup>19</sup>

- The Health Sector Rehabilitation Support Project to ensure that the target population of selected health zones has access to, and use a well-defined package of quality essential health services.
- The Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Project to support the efforts of the Government to demobilize an estimated 150,000 ex-combatants and help them return to civilian life.
- Multi Sectoral HIV/AIDS Project to implement the national strategic plan for HIV/AIDS control activities and provide resources to improve service delivery mechanisms to better the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Emergency Economic and Social Reunification Support Project to facilitate the implementation of urgent reforms in critical areas including initiating a civil service reform. This project will help the government deal with the country's debt situation.
- Private Sector Development and Competitiveness Project to increase the competitiveness of the economy, and thereby contribute to economic growth.

It is hoped that these projects would pave the way for positive changes in the country. The International Monetary Fund is also trying to help the country's economic recovery. In 2006 the UK was the largest bilateral donor to DRC's first democratic elections in 40 years and currently it is the second largest bilateral donor and contributes around £70 million per year. The UK Department for International Development is active in the revival of the DCR economy and has three main objectives:<sup>20</sup>

- Building a capable and accountable state
- Delivering a peace dividend for poor people
- Reducing remaining violent conflict and its impact

Besides aid, the investments have again started pouring into the country by the developed countries and the developing countries like China and India.

## **Continuing Challenges**

Around 25 million Congolese went to the polls in 2006 to cast their votes in the presidential run-off elections, the final step in the nation's first free and fair polls. President Joseph Kabila won with 58 per cent of the vote and a popular mandate to pull Congo out of its vicious circle of violence and economic recession. Voters wanted him to give a meaning to the national motto 'Justice, Paix, Travail' (Justice, Peace, Work). Nevertheless, many people have not perceived positive change since the elections. 'Justice remains in short supply, as has been the case ever since the days when DRC was the private property of the Belgian King Leopold; and peace and work are as endangered as the country's rare mountain gorillas.'<sup>21</sup> To quote Hennemeyer, "The people of Congo want is nothing grandiose – no gleaming new international airports or nuclear reactors – but simply a government that meets some of the most elemental needs of a people who have been deprived of them for years. A few hours of electricity per day, a modest paycheck for schoolteachers, mail delivery, the ability to travel from one town to the next without facing extortion or rape – these do not seem to be excessive demands on a popularly elected government."<sup>22</sup>

The only solution to the quagmire is improved governance. Democracy cannot thrive solely on the conduct of elections. Good governance is an essential part wherein a system of checks and balances is necessary to keep the executive branch of the government in its defined sphere. A free media is important to bring out the truth, a vibrant civil society and opposition are essential to keep the government on its toes. While international attention has concentrated on elections in the DRC, the other elements of a stable democracy are



weak or missing, including the necessary checks on executive power. The Parliament is not very powerful. The judiciary is also not independent and inadequately funded.

The country is trying to overcome the authoritarian rule that was the main cause of chaos and conflict. But it still has to come out of the quagmire of the menace of corruption that is deep rooted. King Leopold epitomized the problem when he said, ‘my rights over the Congo are to be shared by none.’ The Congolese state has suffered from corruption since then. Corruption continues to undermine the economy and administration. The 2002 peace agreement, which established the current political transition, has brought problems of governance into the forefront. Senior positions in the administration and state-run enterprises were shared between signatories, and state resources were siphoned off to fund election campaigns and private accounts. Between 60 and 80 per cent of the customs revenues are estimated to be embezzled, a quarter of the national budget is not properly accounted for, and millions of dollars are misappropriated. The abuse of public office for personal gains is omnipresent from clerical staff to the highest members of government. Political actors regularly interfere in the administration, customs service, army and control of natural resources to embezzle funds. This, in turn, has perpetuated a system of governance that is largely predatory, with the state living off the citizenry and the country’s resources without providing even the most rudimentary social services.

Corruption and politicization within the administrative apparatus undercuts the state’s capacity to collect revenues or use them. The DRC has one of Africa’s weakest collection capacities, with revenues (excluding aid) amounting to just over 10 per cent of GDP. Hundreds of millions of potential tax dollars are embezzled or lost. Hiring and promotions in the administration depend more on connections than competence. Corruption in the armed forces has been particularly detrimental. It has been relatively easy for higher authorities to embezzle their troops’ salaries. The troops, who live in terrible conditions, in turn harass the local population.<sup>23</sup> The army is itself a threat to civilians in the country, while the police seen as a menace in many areas. Some steps have been taken to address the disease of corruption, particularly by local civil society groups, but much more needs to be done.

## **Conclusion**

The then United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, had stated in the year 2001, “One of the biggest challenges currently facing Africa and the United Nations is the challenge of bringing peace and stability to the DRC.” The challenge continues. The second war of DRC officially ended in 2003, but the country continues to be regularly listed as the site of one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises. The country now has a democratic government but the insecurity continues. Since the beginning of the conflict in 1996, millions of people have been killed, unaccounted injured and millions of others have been displaced. The conflict had shattered the economy and virtually destroyed infrastructure with decades of mismanagement and authoritarian and corrupt rule. Health and educational services too have been severely affected. The persistent conditions provide enough evidence that recovery from conflict in the DRC can take many years.

The governance problems have an immediate impact on the humanitarian situation. Ultimately, the spirit of democracy not guns must rule the DRC, and improvements in governance should be the primary focus of all the local, regional as well as international actors in their efforts to help the long-suffering people. To avoid the return of the conflict the reconstruction process has to accompany initiatives to contain violence. The DRC needs global assistance in order to make a speedy economic recovery and to ensure that the fruits of the development are distributed equitably. There is an urgent need to address the disparities among different communities that inhabit the country and promote democracy and rule of law, which can combat corruption and promote good governance. Without an integrated approach that involves national and international institutions, the return to chaos is imminent as shallow peace may not be sustainable. The continued and genuine efforts by local, national and international actors that work in tandem can be the only way out for the country to experience genuine democracy and prevent the a return to chaos.

## **Endnotes**

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2 The continent of Africa has been marred by more than 20 major crises since 1960. Rwanda,  
Somalia, Angola, Sudan, Liberia, DRC, Burundi, etc. are some of the countries that have witnessed  
armed conflict with serious implications. Compared to peaceful countries, African countries in conflict  
have, on an average: 50 per cent more infant deaths, 15 per cent more undernourished people, life  
expectancy reduced by five years, 20 per cent more adult illiteracy, 2.5 times fewer doctors per patient  
and 12.4 per cent less food per person. According to a study conducted by IANSA, Oxfam, and Safe  
World, Africa has lost around \$300bn since 1990 due to armed conflict in Algeria, Angola, Burundi,  
Central African Republic, Chad, DRC, Republic of Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia,  
Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa,  
Sudan and Uganda. The study estimates that this amount of money, if properly utilized, could have  
solved the problems of HIV and AIDS in Africa, or addressed its education, water and sanitation issues,  
and prevented diseases like tuberculosis and malaria. The study also pointed that Africa loses around  
\$18bn per year due to wars, civil wars, and insurgencies. For details see “Africa’s Missing Billions,  
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