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# “U.S. Policy Toward Post Election Democratic Republic of the Congo”

*Africa, Global Health and Human Rights Subcommittee*  
*February 2, 2012*

Today’s hearing today will examine U.S. policy options for dealing with the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the priority countries in the United States’ Africa policy as identified by the Administration and as confirmed by Congressional legislation and oversight over the past several years. This country is two-thirds the size of Western Europe and borders nine African countries. Its problems extend well beyond its borders.

The Subcommittee last examined the situation in the DRC in a hearing in March of last year, when the storm clouds were gathering in advance of the November elections. The DRC is now struggling with the aftermath of those elections. Opposition political parties and civil society, especially the Catholic Church, appear unwilling to accept the results of the presidential and legislative elections. Opposition leader Étienne Tshisekedi received 32 percent of the votes, but he believes he was cheated out of votes that would have made him the winner in the elections. He has staged a presidential swearing-in ceremony and announced that he will form a government. He also has called on supporters to march with him to government headquarters. However, government armed forces have surrounded his home since the presidential results were announced on December 9, and even his aides have been prevented from meeting with him.

Suspicion persists that this election was manipulated in favor of incumbent President Joseph Kabila. The Carter Center, which observed the vote, as well as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and most of DRC’s civil society, all cast serious doubt on the announced outcome of the election. According to the Carter Center, ballots were missing in some areas, while results for Kabila in other areas were deemed “unrealistic.” Calls for new elections not only continue, but appear to be growing in intensity.

Perhaps government intimidation has minimized any uprising by a discontented population, or perhaps the Congolese have accepted that Kabila will do whatever it takes to ensure his victory. It could be that poverty and a lack of information among the population has restrained the widespread resort to protest. Still, there is significant instability throughout the country.

This calls into question the long-term stability of a country that is critical to U.S. interests, which includes the continued flow of strategic minerals. Congolese have reason to be skeptical that they will ever have a stable government that functions on their behalf. There has been one crisis after another since independence in 1960, caused by the selfish actions of predatory leadership. An estimated four million Congolese lost their lives in two wars from which they are still recovering.

Most Congolese remain poor, hungry and in danger of violence. Their government cannot provide the most basic necessities for their families. Public administration is virtually non-existent, with civil servants demanding payment from the public for even the most routine services. MONUSCO is handling security, and the World Health Organization is dealing with the country's public health issues. The challenge for the international community is to help build the capacity and political will of Congolese officials to assume the responsibility for caring for and protecting their citizens.

Since November, violence attributed to the Congolese military, the Rwandan rebel group the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and local militia has caused more than 100,000 Congolese to become internally displaced persons or refugees. Local vigilante groups have clashed with the Rwandan rebels in North Kivu province and displaced about 75,000 from 30 villages in North Kivu province. Similar clashes in Ituri and northern Katanga have had a serious impact in those areas as well. This raises serious concerns for a potential humanitarian crisis.

Women continue to be targeted for abuse in DRC. A study that recently appeared in the *American Journal of Public Health* concluded that an average of 48 women and girls are raped every hour in this country. So before our hearing today is ended, more than 100 females in DRC will have been raped.

However, there remains hope for DRC despite the current crisis. Even during the worst stages of the global financial crisis, the World Bank was predicting that DRC's economy would grow by seven percent annually over the next several years, making it one of the world's fastest growing economies. At the local level, Congolese reportedly have developed coping methods for an absent government. Women have developed rotating credit systems to compensate for an inaccessible banking system, and farmers have banded together to rent trucks to jointly take their produce to market.

According to the latest election results, the ruling party in DRC has lost 45 seats they previously held to opposition parties, with 17 other elections yet to be rerun after being annulled. This may help in establishing grounds for political reconciliation.

Since the early days of Congolese independence, the United States has been involved in the DRC and continues to play a significant role there. In FY2011, Economic Support Funds were targeted to support the Government of Congo's stabilization and recovery program through support to community recovery and reconciliation, conflict mitigation and resolution, and the extension of authority. International Military Education and Training funds focus on training Congolese officers on military justice, human rights and joint operations. The United States also provides significant humanitarian assistance to the DRC. The United States provided bilateral aid to DRC of more than \$205 million in FY2008, \$296 million in FY2009, \$282 million in FY2010, and \$215 million in FY2011. The Obama Administration requested more than \$262 million for FY2012.

Our hearing today will allow the Administration agencies primarily responsible for the United States' relations with the DRC to report on what our government can and will do to help the world's 12th largest country weather this current crisis.