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COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

20 APRIL 2007

RDS-IND
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION SERVICE

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1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Key Documents has been produced by Research, Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 20 April 2007.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- iii For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on the Republic of Congo is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the key documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional documents are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

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It is not the function of the Advisory Panel to endorse any Home Office material or procedures. In the course of its work, the Advisory Panel directly reviews the content of selected Home Office COI documents, but neither the fact that such a review has been undertaken, nor any comments made, should be taken to imply endorsement of the material. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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2. Background information on the Republic of Congo

Full country name: The Republic of Congo (also known as Congo-Brazzaville) [2]

Area: 342,000 sq. km [1a]

Population (UN, 2005): 3.9 million [5a]

Capital city: Brazzaville [2]

Economic capital city: Pointe-Noire [2]

People: 15 principal Bantu groups; more than 70 subgroups. Largest groups are Bacongo, Vili, Bateke, M'Bochi, and Sangha. Also present is a small population (less than 100,000) of Pygmies, ethnically unrelated to the Bantu majority. [1a]

Languages: French (official), Lingala and Munukutuba [1a]

Religion(s): Traditional beliefs 50%, Roman Catholic 35%, other Christian 15%, Muslim 2%. [1a]

Major political parties: More than 100 new parties formed (but not all functional) since multi-party democracy was introduced in 1990. The largest are the Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS), Congolese Labour Party (PCT), Congolese Movement for Democracy and Integral Development (MCDDI), Coalition for Democracy and Social Progress (RDPS), Coalition for Democracy and Development (RDD), Union of Democratic Forces (UFD), Union for Development and Social Progress (UDPS). [1a]

Government: Republic under multi-party democratic rule [1a]

Head of state: President Denis Sassou-Nguesso [2]

(USSD Background Note on the Republic of Congo dated November 2006) [1a]

(FCO Country Profile on the Republic of Congo dated September 2006) [2]

(BBC News Online Country Profile on the Republic of Congo dated March 2007) [5a]

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GEOGRAPHY

The Republic of Congo is a central African country. The climate is tropical. The terrain of the country consists of coastal plains, fertile valleys, a central plateau and forested flood plains. The country's sparse population is concentrated in the south western portion of the country. The vast areas of tropical jungle in the north are largely uninhabited. (USSD Background Note on the Republic of Congo dated November 2006) [1a].

The country is twice the size of the United Kingdom and is bordered by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, and the Angolan enclave of Cabinda. Brazzaville, the capital city, is on the opposite bank of the River Congo to Kinshasa, the capital city of the DRC. (FCO Country Profile on the Republic of Congo dated September 2006) [2]

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RECENT HISTORY

Formal independence was granted to the Congo in August 1960 from France. Congo's first president was Fulbert Youlou whose three years in power were marked by ethnic tensions and political rivalry. In August 1963, Youlou was overthrown in a popular uprising. The Congolese military took control for a brief period and set up a civilian provisional government headed by Alphonse Massamba-Debat. His period in office ended in 1968 in a coup. (USSD Background Note on the Republic of Congo dated November 2006) [1a].

For the next 24 years, there was a succession of military governments. In 1992, multi-party democratic elections took place. Pascal Lissouba of UPADS won the election. UPADS and the MCDDI won the majority of seats in both the National Assembly and Senate, which left the PCT poorly represented. This shift in power destabilised the country and led to conflict between the army and militia groups. Civil war broke out between the militia forces loyal to Lissouba, Kolelas and Sassou-Nguesso, one month before the next elections were due to take place, in July 1997. The war continued for five months, and was finally won by Sassou-Nguesso. The ousted President Lissouba and Prime Minister Bernard Kolelas fled. The planned elections did not take place, the constitution was suspended, and a transitional government was set up. The militia forces, however, fought on sporadically for another two years. A peace agreement was finally reached in November 1999. (FCO Country Profile on the Republic of Congo dated September 2006) [2]

A new constitution was adopted in 2001 and endorsed by a referendum in January 2002. The provisions of the constitution provided for a strong executive president, with a limit of two terms, with the length of the term extended from five years to seven years. The provisions also provided for a bicameral legislature to be elected every five years. The constitution banned political parties organised on regional, ethnic or religion identity. (FCO Country Profile on the Republic of Congo dated September 2006) [2]

In March 2002, renewed violence began in the Pool region, instigated by members of the Ninja militia group, led by Rev. Bitsangou Ntumi. The conflict slowly spread to other parts of the country and intensified as it did so. A peace agreement between the Ninja militia group and the Lissouba government was signed in March 2003 and ended the fighting. In August 2003, the National Assembly formally approved an amnesty for the former Ninja militia fighters. This would be valid from January 2000. (Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo) [7]

Presidential elections were held in March 2002. Most of the key candidates were banned from participating in the elections or withdrew from the election. This left Sassou-Nguesso to win the election virtually unopposed. The legislative elections which followed in May and June 2002 resulted in a large majority in the National Assembly for the PCT and its allies. The opposition parties had largely boycotted these elections. A peace agreement between exiled former Prime Minister Kolelas and President Sassou-Nguesso was signed in March 2003. In January 2005, President Sassou-Nguesso appointed a new government made up exclusively of members of the PCT. (FCO Country Profile on the Republic of Congo dated September 2006) [2]

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In April 2005, the Government announced that it had uncovered a planned coup by a group of army and police officers who happened to have been arrested earlier in 2005 in connection with the theft of arms from a police barracks. The Minister of Security and Public Order, Gen. Paul Mbot, claimed that the alleged coup leader, Capt. Pandi Ngouari, had received support from an exiled former minister. In October 2005, clashes between Ninja fighters and government forces occurred, following the return of Kolelas to the country to attend the funeral of his wife. President Sassou-Nguesso subsequently requested that the legislature grant amnesty to Kolelas in the interests of national reconciliation. This was duly approved, and the death sentence issued in absentia against Kolelas in May 2000, was overturned. Several days after the amnesty was granted, Kolelas apologised to the Congolese people for his role in instigating the 1997 civil war. (Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo) [7]

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ECONOMY

GDP: US\$4.69 billion (2005 estimate)

GDP per capita: US\$1,300 (2005 estimate)

Annual GDP: 7.2% (2006 estimate)

Inflation rate: 2.2% (2005 estimate)

Main Industries: petroleum, timber, phosphates, natural gas, coffee, sugar

Major trading partners: France, USA, Belgium, UK, Italy, Germany, Taiwan, China
(Foreign and Commonwealth Office Republic of Congo Country Profile dated September 2006) [2]

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Republic of Congo Country Profile, dated September 2006, states that:

“The economy remains dependent on oil although production peaked in 2000 at 283,000 bpd, at which point oil accounted for 95% of exports. After a dip in production, volumes were back up to 267,000 bpd by 2005 following the entry into production of new discoveries. Short of new discoveries in deep and ultra-deep waters, production is likely to decline in the medium-term. The sector has long been dominated by the French company TotalFinaElf but many new players including US-based multinationals have entered the market in recent years. While the oil sector was largely insulated during the civil war, the rest of the economy was severely disrupted.”

“Successive post-independence governments have not been able to translate the oil dividend into improvements in living conditions for the population. The opaque workings of the national oil company, SNPC, were recently exposed in an independent audit carried out by KPMG. SNPC’s virtual control of the country’s finances and the lack of transparency in its operations were highlighted as major problems. The country’s long term practice of securing oil-backed commercial loans has left it highly indebted. But the government is now working with both the World Bank and the IMF towards structural reform, re-establishment of basic public services, and promotion of post-conflict recovery through macro-economic stabilisation. In December 2004, the IMF approved a first Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility for three years valued at US\$84.4 million, and in March 2006 approved Congo’s attainment of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) decision point. With a small population and as an oil producer, Congo has never been a major recipient of donor aid, except from France.” [2]

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HUMAN RIGHTS

As regards the human rights situation in the Republic of Congo in 2006, the USSD 2006 Human Rights Report states:

“The government’s human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements, serious problems remained. The following human rights problems were reported: mob violence, including killing of suspected criminals; security force beatings, physical abuse of detainees, rapes, looting, solicitation of bribes, and theft; harassment and extortion of civilians by uncontrolled and unidentified armed elements; poor prison conditions; impunity; arbitrary arrest; lengthy pretrial detention; a corrupt and ineffective judiciary; infringement on citizens’ privacy rights; limits on freedom of the press; restrictions on freedom of movement; official corruption and lack of transparency; domestic violence and societal discrimination against women; trafficking in persons; discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, particularly against Pygmies; and child labor.”
[1b] Introduction

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile on the Republic of Congo adds:

“The human rights record of the Sassou-Nguesso government remains problematic. The security services are reported to be responsible for beatings, arbitrary arrest, looting and rape. Impunity is pervasive, and prison conditions are reported to be harsh. The judiciary is subject to political direction. Congo has three independent human rights organisations but the government is strongly intolerant of their reporting. The independent press is also less free and more controlled by the state than it was in the early 1990s.” **[2]**

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3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

<p>KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY</p>	<p>[1a] [2] [7] [6]</p>	<p>United States Department of State Background Note on the Republic of Congo (November 2006 version) http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2825.htm</p> <p>Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile on the Republic of Congo (September 2006 version) http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019672550816</p> <p>Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo (accessed on 13 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/</p> <p>CIA World Fact Book – Republic of Congo section (accessed on 9 March 2007) https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cf.html</p>
<p>MAP</p>	<p>[14]</p>	<p>Republic of Congo map www.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/africa/republic-of-the-congo/map.htm (accessed on 14 March 2007)</p>
<p>HISTORY</p>	<p>[1a] [2] [5b] [7]</p>	<p>United States Department of State Background Note on the Republic of Congo (November 2006 version) www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2825.htm</p> <p>Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile on the Republic of Congo (September 2006 version) http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019672550816</p> <p>BBC Timeline on the Republic of Congo (14 March 2007 version) http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1076836.stm</p> <p>Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo (accessed on 13 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/</p>

POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on the Republic of Congo www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15
	[5a]	BBC Country Profile on the Republic of Congo (14 March 2007 version) http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1076794.stm
	[7]	Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo (accessed on 13 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
	[6]	CIA World Fact Book – Republic of Congo section https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cf.html (accessed on 9 March 2007)
HUMAN RIGHTS - GENERAL:	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm
	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on the Republic of Congo www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15
	[3b]	Amnesty International 2006 Annual Report on the Republic of Congo http://web.amnesty.org/report2006/cog-summary-eng
HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES: (IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)		
ARREST AND DETENTION	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm
CHILDREN	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm
	[7]	Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo (accessed on 13 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
	[9]	The US Department of Labor's 2005 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor Report, August 2006 www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/tda2005/tda2005.pdf
CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY	[10]	Citizenship laws of the world www.multiplecitizenship.com/wscl/ws_CONGO.html (accessed 14 March 2007)

CORRUPTION	<p>[4]</p> <p>[1b]</p> <p>[11]</p>	<p>Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on the Republic of Congo www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15 (accessed 9 March 2007)</p> <p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p> <p>Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2006 http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006</p>
DEATH PENALTY	[3a]	<p>Amnesty International report on the death penalty - List of Abolitionist and Retentionist Countries (March 2007 version) http://web.amnesty.org/pages/deathpenalty-countries-eng</p>
ETHNIC GROUPS	<p>[1a]</p> <p>[1b]</p> <p>[6]</p>	<p>United States Department of State Background Note on the Republic of Congo (November 2006 version) www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2825.htm</p> <p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p> <p>CIA World Fact Book – Republic of Congo section https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cf.html</p>
DISABILITY	[1b]	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p>
EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS	<p>[1b]</p> <p>[4]</p>	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p> <p>Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on the Republic of Congo www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15 (accessed 9 March 2007)</p>
FOREIGN REFUGEES	[1b]	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p>
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT	[1b]	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p>
FREEDOM OF RELIGION	<p>[1b]</p> <p>[1c]</p>	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p> <p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on International Religious Freedom on the Republic of Congo, 15 September 2006 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71296.htm</p>

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND MEDIA	<p>[1b]</p> <p>[4]</p> <p>[5a]</p>	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p> <p>Freedom House ‘Freedom in the World 2006’ Report on the Republic of Congo www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15 (accessed 9 March 2007)</p> <p>BBC Country Profile on the Republic of Congo (14 March 2007 version) http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1076794.stm</p>
HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS	[1b]	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p>
JUDICIARY	<p>[1b]</p> <p>[4]</p> <p>[7]</p> <p>[6]</p>	<p>United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm</p> <p>Freedom House ‘Freedom in the World 2006’ Report on the Republic of Congo www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15 (accessed 9 March 2007)</p> <p>Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo (accessed on 13 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/</p> <p>CIA World Fact Book – Republic of Congo section https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cf.html (accessed 9 March 2007)</p>
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS	[15]	<p>“Legal Status of Homosexuality in Africa” Afrol News report, not dated (accessed on 14 March 2007) www.afrol.com/html/Categories/Gay/backgr_legalstatus.htm</p>
MEDICAL ISSUES	<p>[8a]</p> <p>[8b]</p> <p>[16]</p> <p>[6]</p>	<p>World Health Organisation (WHO) Country Profile on the Republic of Congo (accessed on 13 March 2007) http://www.who.int/countries/cog/en/</p> <p>World Health Organisation (WHO) Mental Health Atlas 2005, Republic of Congo Country Profile (accessed 13 March 2007) http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2005/np21/en/index.html</p> <p>Republic of Congo Country Situation Analysis United Nations AIDS (Joint UN Programme on AIDS) http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Countries/republic_of_congo.asp</p> <p>CIA World Fact Book – Republic of Congo section https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cf.html</p>

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	[6]	CIA World Fact Book – Republic of Congo section https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cf.html (accessed 9 March 2007)
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	[7]	Europa World Online section on the Republic of Congo (accessed on 13 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
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TRAFFICKING	[1b]	United States Department of State, 2006 Report on Human Rights Practices – Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007 www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm
	[1d]	United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons 2006 Report, 5 June 2006 www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65988.htm
	[4]	Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report on the Republic of Congo www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15 (accessed 9 March 2007)
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Date accessed 9 February 2007
 - b 2006 Country Report on Human Rights Practices on the Republic of Congo, 6 March 2007
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78729.htm>
Date accessed 7 March 2007
 - c International Religious Freedom 2005 Report on the Republic of Congo, 15 September 2006
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 - d Trafficking in Persons 2006 Report, 5 June 2006
www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65988.htm
Date accessed 13 March 2007

- 2 **Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom**
Country Profile: Congo, (13 September 2006 version)
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/ServletFront?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019672550816>
Date accessed 2 March 2007

- 3 **Amnesty International (AI)**
 - a List of Abolitionist and Retentionist Countries (March 2007)
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/deathpenalty-countries-eng>
Date accessed 2 April 2007
 - b 2006 Annual Report on the Republic of Congo
<http://web.amnesty.org/report2006/cog-summary-eng>
Date accessed 15 March 2007

- 4 **Freedom House**
Republic of Congo section of the 'Freedom in the World 2006' Report
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- 5 **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)**
 - a Country Profile: Republic of Congo, 14 March 2007
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1076794.stm
Date accessed 2 April 2007
 - b Timeline: Republic of Congo, 14 March 2007
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- 6 **CIA World Fact Book**
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- 7 **Europa World Online**
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<http://www.europaworld.com/pub/>
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- 8 **World Health Organization (WHO) reports** <http://www.who.int/en/>
 - a Country Profile on the Republic of Congo
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 - b 2005 Mental Health Atlas
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- 9 **US Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs**
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www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/tda2005/tda2005.pdf
Date accessed 14 December 2006
- 10 **Citizenship laws of the world**
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http://www.multiplecitizenship.com/wscl/ws_CONGO.html
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- 11 **Transparency International**
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- 12 **Terrorism Research Centre**
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- 13 **War Resisters' International (WRI)**
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- 14 **Republic of Congo map**
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- 15 **Afrol News**
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www.afrol.com/html/Categories/Gay/backgr_legalstatus.htm
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- 16 **United Nations AIDS (Joint UN Programme on AIDS)**
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