



Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The “Street” and Politics in DR Congo

Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°123
Nairobi/Brussels, 13 October 2016

I. Overview

Demonstrations in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), turned violent on 19 September 2016, when the Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) should have launched the constitutionally-required presidential election process. Protests were expected as a political dialogue launched on 1 September had failed to agree on what to do about the delay. This has accentuated the risk of violent popular anger in urban centres and of a heavy-handed security response. A risk also remains that political parties, including the ruling majority coalition (henceforth “the majority”) and the opposition that looks to the street to force President Joseph Kabila to step down, will seek to manipulate that anger. Depending on loosely organised popular revolts to force political change is a tactic that could spiral out of control. To prevent more violence, Congo’s partners need to use diplomatic and financial tools to focus the actors, particularly the majority, on the need to move rapidly to credible elections. They also need to use their leverage and public positions to minimise violence while the political blockage continues.

Throughout the DRC’s history, political actors have expected the power of the street to change seemingly deadlocked political situations. As in past periods of popular revolt, there is now a merging political crisis and economic downturn. The promise of democratisation has accentuated the country’s fragmentation since the 1990s, and the popular legitimacy of political parties and civil society organisations, with the exception of the Catholic Church, continues to shrink as their numbers grow. Public frustration is exacerbated by pervasive poverty and chronic violence. The government’s control increasingly rests on largely dysfunctional security forces in which issues of command and control increase the risk for excessive use of force. Protest is a legitimate form of political expression by a population understandably frustrated by the failure to adhere to the constitution and hold elections on time. The primary responsibility for ensuring that protests take place peacefully lies with the government. However, protests to succeed must be part of a coherent political strategy; no actors should use them to inflame tensions.

Ten years after the generally successful 2006 elections, the DRC faces another deep crisis. President Kabila’s attempt to stay in power beyond his second and last constitutionally-permitted term, which concludes on 19 December, is unravelling

more than a decade of progress. Less than three months before his mandate ends, the majority hopes to retain power by forcing a long delay of the vote (*glissement*), while the opposition vies to lead a “transition”. With the end of Kabila’s mandate near and in the absence of a consensus agreement, the risk of further violent confrontation increases.

To reduce the potential for urban violence in the coming months:

- ❑ The African Union (AU), UN and other international partners will have to support further inclusive political dialogue with a focus on the post-19 December arrangements and directed toward getting to credible elections within a tight, specified timetable. Domestic actors will have to climb down from their maximalist positions and engage in this dialogue in good faith.
- ❑ Short of resolving the political deadlock, they will also need to take measures to reduce the risk of violence, while allowing for legitimate peaceful protest. Political parties have a large responsibility not only to work toward elections in good faith, but also to avoid further inflaming tensions. The government must maintain media freedoms, balanced by holding accountable state actors and opposition politicians alike.
- ❑ From the internationals’ side, more forceful and coherent diplomacy, even, for example, the threat of removing UN peacekeepers, in particular the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), could help advance the dialogue. Building police capacity to manage protests peacefully, using the good offices of the UN and the diplomatic corps and judiciously threatening targeted sanctions on those who inflame tensions could help reduce the risk of violence.

This briefing is based on fieldwork in Bukavu, Goma, Lubumbashi and Kinshasa and is part of a series of publications on the DRC’s broader electoral process.

II. Current Political Context

Over the five years since Kabila’s 2011 re-election, Congolese political debate has focused on 2016 and the end of his second mandate.¹ The opposition and civil society, including the Catholic Church through its national managing body, CENCO have consistently supported the constitution’s presidential term limit and electoral timetable.² Huge demonstrations in January 2015 to protest against apparent government attempts to delay the elections showed that this position has wide support. However, with elections still some way off and the ruling majority showing no signs of being willing to relinquish power, the situation has become blocked.

The opposition comprises historical opponents of Kabila, led by Etienne Tshisekedi’s Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), as well as others who were once with Kabila but now oppose him, such as Vital Kamerhe’s Union for the Congo-

¹ See Crisis Group Africa Reports N°s 225, *Congo: Is Democratic Change Possible?*, 5 May 2015; 239, *Katanga: Tensions in DRC’s Mineral Heartland*, 3 August 2016; and statement, “A Nuanced but Firm Political Approach for DR Congo’s Decisive Autumn”, 15 September 2016.

² CENCO is the national episcopal conference of the Congo, including all the country’s Catholic bishops.

lese Nation (UNC) and newer arrivals who split from the majority in 2015: the G7 group of seven parties that left the majority and Moïse Katumbi.³ Politicised youth and civil society organisations have increasingly joined the political debate. While attempts at opposition unity such as the “Citizen Front 2016” faltered, they were succeeded in June 2016 by the *Rassemblement*, which brings together the UDPS, G7 and Katumbi, as well as a number of other parties, but not the UNC.⁴

To agree on the management of the country post-19 December and the organisation of the elections, most Congolese actors as well as the international community agree to the principle of political dialogue. The first such attempt to address electoral questions was launched in September, facilitated by the AU, but the *Rassemblement* refused to take part, demanding release of political prisoners and a stronger international mediation role. CENCO did participate but stated its concerns about lack of inclusivity early on.⁵

On 19 September, when the electoral process should have started, the opposition held a protest march that continued for two days despite violence from the start. The UN Human Rights Council estimated the toll at 53 dead and over 100 wounded.⁶ While the AU-facilitated dialogue stagnates, international pressure has been rising on the majority and opposition alike. In a major meeting in Kinshasa on 4 October, the *Rassemblement* laid out its vision for a dialogue, indicating a more conciliatory approach.⁷ An anxious population is watching, uncertain about joining any future opposition call for mobilisation that could result in further violence, but angry enough to “spontaneously” erupt given the right political or social trigger. It remains unclear whether, in case of a major confrontation, the security forces will remain unified behind the majority.

III. The “Street” in Congolese History

Street protest is a vital part of Congolese political life, especially as people have few other channels to express views and dissatisfaction. It was particularly important on the eve of independence in 1960, during the aborted democratisation period of the early 1990s, at the beginning of the Second Congo War (1998-2003) and in both rounds of democratic elections (2006 and 2011). However, popular protest movements have rarely achieved their desired ends. More often they have been manipulated for political gain or been unable to shift political dynamics. Protests also have had a dark side. State actors have often used and sometimes instigated violent street movements to discredit foes and allow poorly paid security forces to loot, as under Mobutu in 1993. Their agents have frequently used disproportionate force, and destruction has been particularly bad when discipline breaks down. Large, protest

³ Katumbi is the high-profile former governor of Katanga who broke from his former ally president Kabila in 2015 and declared his intent to run for president in May 2016.

⁴ In full: “Le Rassemblement des Forces Politiques et Sociales de la RDC acquiesces au changement”.

⁵ Crisis Group interviews, opposition and CENCO officials, Kinshasa, September 2016.

⁶ *Rassemblement* communiqué, 13 September 2016. Crisis Group email correspondence, Kinshasa-based Congolese official, September 2016. The opposition considered its death toll to be 50. “RD Congo: La solitude du chef”, *Jeune Afrique*, 25 September 2016. “Violences à Kinshasa: l’ONU dénonce ‘un usage excessif de la force’”, Radio Okapi, 29 September 2016.

⁷ Final report of the *Rassemblement* meeting, Kinshasa 4 October 2016. “Congo: Reynders veut une date pour les élections”, *Le Soir*, 5 October 2016.

often results in riot and looting and can manifest ugly xenophobic attitudes, whether anti-Rwandan in the civil war or against Chinese businesses lately.

The street is an easily sparked powder keg. Violence is omnipresent in the rapidly-growing cities, often exacerbated rather than restrained by a still-militarised style of policing, and the presence of the army and politicised intelligence service.⁸ The mostly pauperised urban population lives a precarious existence characterised by daily struggle. Families have little to no reserves, must make hard choices, for example what child to send to school, and depend on mostly informal solidarity networks to make ends meet.⁹

Congo urbanised rapidly under colonial rule, and by 1957 23 per cent of the population, particularly migrant labour, lived in major industrial and transportation hubs.¹⁰ Urban growth continued even after the economic recession in the late 1950s, but fed by a rural exodus and increasing numbers of people born in cities.¹¹ The colonial state, nicknamed *bula matari* (the breaker of rocks), maintained a firm grip through its *force publique*, despite periodic uprisings.

Independence was precipitated by massive riots in Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) in January 1959. While the immediate trigger was a football match, the underlying factors were similar to other periods of popular revolt: violent security services, poor living standards and a single political idea, in this case independence, rapidly gaining ground. Under President Mobutu Sese Seko's one-party state (1965-1990), political protest was mostly by students. His 1968 decision to abolish their unions in favour of his party youth wing led to violent protest in 1969. Frequent student protest also accompanied the end of the one-party state in 1990, including a May incident when students humiliated members of parliament by abducting them and cutting their hair. The infiltration of state agents at the University of Lubumbashi (UNILU) in 1991 resulted in a massacre of up to 100 people on the campus and cuts in international aid.¹²

The aborted 1990s democratisation process prompted the mushrooming of political parties and social organisations in and around the National Sovereign Conference

⁸ Kinshasa's population is estimated to have grown from nearly 2.7 million in 1984 (the last census) to over eleven million. “Democratic Republic of Congo” at <http://data.un.org>. Police reform, part of the wider security sector reform (SSR) launched after the 2003 war, emphasises “community policing”, but implementation and training remain problematic. Crisis Group interview, senior Congolese officials, Kinshasa, September 2016.

⁹ “This poverty is such that the population is driven to asking what the state does for it”, Crisis Group translation of Senate President Kengo Wa Dondo's 15 September speech opening the second parliamentary session of 2016. Crisis Group interview, womens group representative, Kinshasa, September 2016. On informal networks, see Michel Lusamba Kibayu, “Portrait des quartiers populaires à Kinshasa: un territoire, une identité”, Institute d'études du développement, Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), 2009.

¹⁰ For more, see Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo* (New Jersey, 1965), pp. 204-231.

¹¹ City dwellers, physically disconnected from their area of origin, created new social institutions such as “tribal organisations” and unions. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹² Charles Didier Gondola, “Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence and Masculinity among the Young Bills of Kinshasa”, *Afrique & histoire*, vol. 7 (2009), pp. 75-98; Young, *Politics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153. Jean Abemba Bulaimu, Hubert Ntumba Lukungwa, *Mouvements étudiants et évolution politique en République Démocratique du Congo, Tôme 1: 1971-1991*, Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes Politiques (Kinshasa, 2004). Gauthier de Villers, Jean Omasombo, “When Kinis Take to the Street”, in Theodore Trefon (ed.), *Reinventing order in the Congo* (London, 2004), p. 141. “Zaire, a country study”, Area Handbook Series (Library of Congress, 1994), p. 246. Crisis Group interview, academic, Lubumbashi, June 2015.

(CNS).¹³ The period also saw hyperinflation and political deadlock, leading to mutinies and widespread looting, initiated by military units then followed by the population. Kinshasa was most severely hit, first in September 1991 (followed by similar incidents in other provinces) and again in January 1993. The latter transgressions, by Mobutu’s Special Presidential Division (DSP), were particularly violent, with up to 500 casualties. The economic impact was disastrous.¹⁴

The period’s largest popular mobilisation was the 16 February 1992 “March of Hope”, or “March of the Christians”, mainly organised by Catholic parishes and lay organisations, rather than the church hierarchy. This mostly peaceful procession was unauthorised and violently repressed by DSP troops, with at least 35 casualties.¹⁵ This and subsequent unrest had a profound impact on political consciousness, especially in Kinshasa, though it did not precipitate desired change: Mobutu only left power in 1997, as his regime crumbled under pressure of a foreign invasion.

In response to the violence, the opposition increasingly reverted to *journées ville morte* (one-day general strikes), which aimed to bring public and economic life in the cities to a halt. However, precarious social conditions meant that many people could not afford to observe them. Another phenomenon was the emergence of the *parlementaires debout* (street debaters).¹⁶

The First Congo War (1996-1997) and Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s seizure of power put democratisation on hold for a decade. He tried to replace representative democracy with Popular Power Committees (CPP), but they amounted to little as his regime did not capture popular imagination. Motivated by strong anti-Rwandan sentiment and nationalist fervour at the start of the Second Congo War (1998-2003), the street rose in August 1998, mobilising self-defence groups to help defend Kinshasa. Citizens called it “a liberation through their own hands”, but it did not translate to greater governmental legitimacy.¹⁷

Joseph Kabila assumed the presidency after his father was assassinated in 2001. In line with the peace agreement that ended the Second Congo War, he started a transition in 2003 and voter registration in 2005 that reignited democratic aspirations. The voter card, also an identity card, became an important symbol, but the public’s enthusiasm was not shared by politicians in the transition government. Election

¹³ The CNS, inspired by events in other Francophone African countries, lasted from 1991 to 1992 and consisted of a wide-ranging review of the country’s history in an attempt to set the stage for a better future. While it produced some valuable discussion, it was undermined by Mobutu.

¹⁴ Average inflation in 1990-1995 was 3,616 per cent. David Van Reybrouck, *Congo, the Epic History of a People* (New York, 2015) p. 430. René Lemarchand, “The Democratic Republic of Congo: From Collapse to Potential Reconstruction”, University of Copenhagen, September 2001. Gauthier de Villers, *Zaire: la transition manqué 1990-1997* (Tervuren, 1997), p. 29. de Villers, Omasombo, “When Kinois Take to the Street”, op. cit., p. 147.

¹⁵ Mwamba Bapuwa, Phillippe Dorlodot, *Marche d’espoir: Kinshasa 16 février 1992* (Paris, 2000). Van Reybrouck, *Congo*, op. cit., p. 403.

¹⁶ de Villers, Omasombo, “When Kinois Take to the Street”, op. cit., p. 146. Crisis Group interviews, journalist, local communities in neighbourhoods (*cités*), Kinshasa, July, September 2016. *Parlementaires debout*, groups of mostly men debating current affairs, perform an important role as conduits between the population and political parties, making sense of and contributing to *radio trottoir* (pavement radio) in a country where access to media is limited. Camille Dugrand, “‘Combattants de la parole’: parlementaires-debout et mobilisation partisane à Kinshasa”, *Politique Africaine*, no. 127 (2012), pp. 49-69.

¹⁷ de Villers, *Histoire du Politique au Congo-Kinshasa* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2016), p. 161; de Villers, Omasombo, “La bataille de Kinshasa”, *Politique Africaine*, no. 84 (2001), pp. 17-32.

delays announced in 2005 caused riots in January, May and June. The main actors were the Catholic Church, which played a calming role, and the exiled Etienne Tshisekedi, who agitated public opinion and whose UPDS party boycotted the voter registration and electoral process.¹⁸ Rioting in Kinshasa resulted in several casualties but did not derail the process. The elections represented hope for development and an end to a decade of conflict and destruction.

While the 2006 election was widely considered credible, there was short but intense urban warfare between the military factions of the two main candidates, President Kabila and Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) leader and Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba.¹⁹ Angolan troops intervened in support of Kabila in Kinshasa, and fighting was stopped in the capital by the presence of the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and the European Force for the DRC (EUFOR RD Congo).²⁰

The 2011 election had a very different dynamic. Though militias were gone, at least in urban areas, so too was much hope and confidence. An unpopular Kabila kept tight control over CENI. His main opponent, Tshisekedi, was confrontational, calling for his followers (*combattants*) to “terrorise” the police. CENI declared Kabila the victor, but Tshisekedi symbolically took the oath of office in his Kinshasa headquarters. However, his expected call for an uprising never came, turning some militants against his party.²¹ The street responded relatively calmly.

IV. Grievances and Strategies for Mobilisation

A. Socio-economic Grievance, Political Catalyst

The grievances that drive protest movements in the DRC are broad, but centre on living conditions and political freedom. A 2011 report analysing their perceptions concluded that Congolese “were generally pessimistic about the current state of their country”. The most prominent grievances are unemployment, corruption and lack of access to education, electricity, roads and transport. Rising inflation, a consequence of economic crisis, further worsens precarious living conditions.²²

¹⁸ Gérard Prunier, *From Genocide to Continental War* (London, 2009), pp. 303-304.

¹⁹ The fighting also included street children (*shégués*) in units under Bemba’s command. Gérard Gerold, “RD Congo, analyse comparative des violences électorales (2006-2011)”, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 2013.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, DRC diplomat, Pretoria, April 2015; Claudia Major, “EU-UN cooperation in military crisis management: the experience of EUFOR RD Congo in 2006”, European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), September 2008.

²¹ Theodore Trefon, *Congo Masquerade* (London, 2011), p. 29. Crisis Group Report, *Congo*, op. cit. “RDC: Etienne Tshisekedi appelle à la violence et à la terreur”, Agence France-Presse, 11 November 2011. Clashes in Kinshasa between Tshisekedi’s followers and pro-government militants on the election eve led to at least ten deaths. “Le bilan des tensions à Kinshasa s’alourdit: environ 10 morts et 40 blessés”, Radio Okapi, 27 November 2011. Crisis Group interview, Congolese analyst, Nairobi, September 2016.

²² Democratic Republic of Congo, Nationwide Baseline Perception Research Report, May 2011, pp. 1-3 (non-attributed document, in Crisis Group’s possession). Crisis Group interviews, youth and community associations, civil society representatives, Masina and Lingwala municipalities, Kinshasa, September 2016. See also Gérard Bisambu (ed.), “Verbatim des populations Congo-

Violent crime is another scourge in Kinshasa’s heavily populated poor neighbourhoods (*cités*). Most notorious are the often violent, machete-wielding *Kuluna* urban gangs. After 10pm people rarely go into the sparsely lit streets.²³ In 2013, police launched the violent Operation Likofi to tackle the gangs. Popular reaction to abuses was mixed, as *Kuluna* activity dropped for a considerable period. Politicians, in particular the majority’s Peoples’ Party for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD), reportedly use *Kuluna* to sow disorder during protests.²⁴

Socio-economic frustration and the fact that Kinshasa’s population has never identified with the regime contribute to hostility toward specific communities. This is particularly true for Swahili speakers, originating from the East and thus identified with the current regime.²⁵ Joseph Kabila has never connected to the capital’s people and does not speak the city’s language, Lingala.²⁶ During the January 2015 riots, Chinese-owned shops in the *cités* were targeted and plundered. Hostility towards the Indo-Pakistani community is based on economic competition but is also due to media coverage of attacks on Congolese living in India.²⁷

The state’s inability to address continuing insecurity in the East is a permanent source of tension. Agitation about the wars and disturbances there (1,500km from Kinshasa) has remained limited elsewhere, except during the take-over of Goma in 2012 by the rebel M23, whose Rwandan support touched a very raw public nerve, and the ongoing security crisis in Beni (North Kivu).²⁸ Violence in Beni appears to many

laises”, Agir pour des Elections transparentes et apaisées (AETA), March-April 2016. Crisis Group interview, Lingwala community association, Kinshasa, September 2016.

²³ Krossy Mavakala Kalunseviko, *Etude de la Perception du Phénomène Kuluna par les Habitants de la Commune de Kinshasa* (Kinshasa, 2013). The gangs are associated with combat sports (boxing, wrestling); members are called *jeunes sportifs* or *Pomba*. Crisis Group interviews, citizens, Kinshasa, September 2016.

²⁴ “Report of The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office on Human Rights Violations committed by Agents of the PNC during Operation Likofi in Kinshasa between 15 November 2013 and 15 February 2014”, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-HCHR), October 2014. Crisis Group interviews, citizens, Kinshasa, March 2016. Crisis Group interview, youth group representative, Kinshasa, September 2016.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, civil society member, Kinshasa, September 2016; Kris Berwouts, “The Rise of the Street: The Population of Kinshasa as an unpredictable Actor in the Electoral Process”, Africa Policy Brief no. 16, Egmont Institute, July 2016, p. 3. From the outset the regime has been identified with the Kivus and Katanga, both predominantly Swahili-speaking areas.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Congolese citizens, Kinshasa, March, July, September 2016. “Pourquoi les Kinois n’aiment pas Joseph Kabila”, SlateAfrique.com, 27 April 2012. Kabila polled 14.7 per cent in Kinshasa in the 2006 first round, 32 per cent in the run-off against Bemba; and 30 per cent, versus 64.1 per cent for Etienne Tshiskedi in the single 2011 round.

²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, youth group representative, Kinshasa, March 2016; Congolese small business owner, Kinshasa, September 2016. Chinese companies operate many mines and are building infrastructure in several cities, and there are many small Chinese businesses that compete with “local” businesses, contributing to some hostility. “RDC: les commerces indiens sous protection policière à Kinshasa”, RFI, 9 September 2016. Congolese resent Indians and Pakistanis for operating successful small businesses, undercutting market prices. Crisis Group interview, Congolese researcher, Kinshasa, July 2016.

²⁸ Unknown assailants in Beni have killed over 600 civilians over two years. Attacks are mostly attributed to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), but research also implicates military units, former Rally for Congolese Democracy-Kisangani/Movement for Liberation (RCD-K/ML) and community self-defence groups. “Qui sont les tueurs de Beni”, Congo Research Group, March 2016. For more background on the ADF, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°23, *Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU’s Lost Rebellion*, 19 December 2012.

to show government indifference and failure of the armed forces and has sparked political mobilisation in the cities in North Kivu (Beni, Butembo, Bunia and Goma). Social movements, such as *Lucha* (see below), and political actors from the East are outraged. Many use social media to protest. Showing how lack of trust in the broader political process and more local concerns often interweave, some fear the government may use the Beni situation to delay elections.²⁹

For most in Kinshasa, Kabila has become the symbol of stagnation and societal ills. In the current political climate, traditional civil society, new youth organisations and the radical political opposition have found a degree of unity in their stance against him, but there is little agreement on the way forward.³⁰

B. *The Politics of Mobilisation*

Society is highly fragmented, with more than 500 political parties and a myriad of social organisations and platforms claiming to represent it.³¹ The credibility and foundation of most parties is very shallow, even that of the few big ones, the majority and opposition alike, such as PPRD, UDPS and the Unified Lumumbist Party (PALU). It is notable that many calls for mobilisation from parties since January 2015 have gone largely unheeded. Tshisekedi, the historic opposition leader, seems to be the only politician capable of mobilising large numbers.³²

1. The churches

The Catholic Church, with its clerical, lay and educational structures, has deep roots in the DRC. Since the 2011 elections, Cardinal Monsengwo and the Church more generally have criticised regime attempts to extend its time in power. The Church softened its vocal stance somewhat in early 2016, when it cancelled a repeat of the 1992 “March of the Christians”, and is currently actively involved to help increase the inclusiveness of the dialogue and negotiate an agreement between government and opposition over the terms that would allow dialogue to continue with the necessary popular legitimacy.³³ In mid-2016, it launched a long-planned, massive civic and voter education program, focusing on dialogue and non-violence. As an important moral voice, it can, to a limited degree, calm the public, but it is not monolithic and

²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, civil society, youth groups and local researchers, Goma and Bukavu, March 2016. “#JesuisBeni: les Congolais mobilisés pour en finir avec les massacres au Kivu”, *Le Monde Afrique*, 17 May 2016. Crisis Group interview, civil society representative, Kinshasa, September 2016. The majority’s UDCO party leader stated as much regarding election delay in a recent interview. Jean-Claude Masangu, “Dialogue: L’aboutissement espéré est qu’on puisse avoir des élections apaisées prochainement”, *Digitalcongo*, 12 September 2016.

³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, local community groups, youth activist, Kinshasa, September 2016.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, Congolese researcher, Kinshasa, September 2016. This complicated the September 2016 dialogue, which ever more civil society organisations tried to join. Crisis Group interviews, civil society member, Kinshasa, September 2016.

³² Crisis Group interviews, Masina and Lingwala municipalities, Kinshasa, September 2016. See also Berwouts, “The Rise of the Street”, *op. cit.*, July 2016. For an analysis of Congolese political parties, see “Les Partis Politiques Congolais en Question”, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung/Centre d’Etudes Politiques, 2013. Christophe Rigaud, “RDC: l’opposition montre les muscles à Kinshasa”, *Afrikarabia*, 31 July 2016.

³³ CENCO stated that the events on 19 and 20 September, after which it suspended its participation in the dialogue, demonstrated the dialogue’s lack of popular support. CENCO communiqué, 1 October 2016.

has to find consensus between its various organisations and constituencies. Other faith-based organisations such as the Kimbanguist, protestant and charismatic churches, generally are considered closer to the majority but have limited political impact.³⁴

2. Youth movements

Youth frustration with lack of employment and effective governance has led to the rise of a new type of social organisation, typified by *Lucha* (*Lutte pour le Changement*), a group formed in Goma in May 2012. Starting as a protest against the lack of drinking water there, it is creative in its social action and protest and has since taken a more political stance, drawing the ire of North Kivu Governor Julien Paluku, who called it “tomorrow’s terrorists”. It is loosely and flatly structured, using mostly social media to fight for better governance, but it has significant leadership problems and shallow roots nationally, so has difficulty coordinating positions countrywide.³⁵ Its internal workings are not clear and an international civil society observer called it “almost a sect”.³⁶

In April 2014, *Lucha* helped create *Filimbi* (whistle), which held its first meeting in March 2015 in Kinshasa. It was inspired by other successful African youth movements, in particular *Y’en a marre* (Senegal) and *Balai Citoyen* (Burkina Faso).³⁷ Security forces arrested participants, and government spokesman Lambert Mende said its members were “terrorists”.³⁸ Several *Filimbi* leaders, including coordinator Floribert Anzuluni, are now based abroad.

Relations between *Lucha* and *Filimbi* have been uneasy. *Lucha* remains a loosely-organised middle-class movement, largely based in Goma, while *Filimbi* is mainly composed of well-connected Kinshasa youth.³⁹ When President Kabila met unexpectedly with *Lucha* in Goma on 18 August 2016, *Filimbi* said on social media that it would never have done so.⁴⁰ *Lucha* maintains discreet contacts with senior officials,

³⁴ “RDC – le Cardinal Monsengwo: Dieu, Kabila et lui”, *Jeune Afrique*, 22 December 2015. Crisis Group interviews, CENCO officials, Kinshasa, March, July, September 2016. “Guide de l’Animateur et de l’Animatrice de Proximité pour la Première Campagne d’Education Civique”, *Projet d’Education Civique et Electorale de la Cenco*, May 2016. Bishop Fridolin Ambongo, CENCO deputy president, is the public leader of the more assertive, principled line. Crisis Group email correspondence, Kinshasa-based diplomat, September 2016; Crisis Group analyst interview in previous capacity, senior clergy, Kisangani, September 2015. Crisis Group interview, Congolese researcher, Kinshasa, September 2016.

³⁵ Kris Berwouts, “‘La Lucha’ – Goma’s own brand of Indignados”, *African Arguments*, 13 January 2014. Crisis Group interviews, *Lucha* members and sympathisers, Goma, March 2016; Kinshasa, September 2016.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, international civil society observer, Kinshasa, June 2016.

³⁷ Those movements resisted attempts by the Senegalese (Wade) and Burkina Faso (Campaoré) presidents to circumvent term limits.

³⁸ “‘Questions et Réponses’ sur Filimbi à l’attention des membres du Parlement de la République Démocratique du Congo”, Kinshasa 2 April 2015 (document in Crisis Group’s possession). “DRC: Treated Like Criminals: DRC’s Race to Silence Dissent”, *Amnesty International*, 26 November 2015; Laurène Rimondi, “RDC: Filimbi, la nouvelle génération de citoyens qui ébranle le pouvoir”, *Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP)*, 17 August 2015.

³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, youth activists, *Lucha*, *Filimbi*, several other civil society organisations, Brussels, February 2016; Goma, March 2016; Kinshasa, September 2016.

⁴⁰ “Non, Filimbi ne rencontrera jamais Kabila”, *affirme Ben Carbone*, *Politico*, August 2016. Crisis Group social media interaction, *Filimbi* leadership, Nairobi, August 2016. *Lucha* appointed a

mainly to secure release of its members, reportedly in exchange for a more conciliatory attitude toward the political dialogue. Government repression has increased both movements' visibility and legitimacy. Amnesty International has campaigned for release of the activists, whose incarceration has paradoxically facilitated their numbers: the Kinshasa *Lucha* chapter was founded in the city's prison.⁴¹

Lucha's and *Filimbi's* reach beyond Goma and Kinshasa remains shallow. Other youth groups lead a more discreet existence. During the January 2015 protests and subsequent ones in Lubumbashi, Goma and Kinshasa, many youths confronted the security forces, and they reportedly remain organised in Kinshasa, at least in part based on those experiences. Some may be willing to escalate violence; in January 2015, a number of people targeted regime symbols, including ransacking the evangelical church attended by Kinshasa police Chief Célestin Kanyama.⁴² Politicians' telephone numbers circulated on social media, and several received threats. During the 19 September 2016 Kinshasa riots, protesters burned properties of officials close to the majority, including its party representatives.

Groups such as *Lucha* insist on non-violent protest and try to capture the imagination with initiatives such as a proposal to mobilise 50,000 volunteers to support CENI's election preparation work.⁴³ However, their followers may find it hard to avoid being pulled into the increasingly heated and polarised climate.

3. Communication

The widely used protest rallying cries are “*yebela*” (“know-it”, ie, that your mandate is about to expire) and “*televa*” (“arise”, “stand-up”). The latter has been adopted by “Citizen Front 2016” and chanted at several public occasions, including a 4 September international football match.⁴⁴ Both are prominent social media hashtags. Social media has some reach in Kinshasa, but the most potent communication is by word of mouth and SMS, by which rumours and information spread rapidly through the sprawling city and country. During the January 2015 protests, authorities shut down mobile internet and SMS communications.

Because of the formal media's limited independence, reach and capacity, opposition parties, especially the UDPS, spread more complex messages through groups such as the *parlementaires debout*, which are linked to their militants (*combattants*). The distribution of paper tracts remains the main way to call for mobilisation. The opposition considers official media rebuttals of these free publicity. In a city where music is omnipresent, songs, often challenging dire social conditions, are another

representative from a list of political prisoners to be released for the preparatory talks, but he continues to be held. Crisis Group email correspondence, *Lucha*, August 2016.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and analysts, Kinshasa, March 2016; *Lucha*, Goma, March 2016; Kinshasa, September 2016; “Dismantling dissent, DRC's repression of expression amidst electoral delays”, Amnesty International, September 2016.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, youth and civil society activists and Congolese researcher, Goma, March 2016; Kinshasa, March, July, September 2016.

⁴³ “Alternance dans les délais constitutionnels: L'ultime solution”, communiqué *Lucha*, 14 September 2016.

⁴⁴ The “*yebela*” rally cry originates from a song first used during a 2015 football match with Congo-Brazzaville. The song is summarised as “Watch out, everything has a beginning and an end; soon your mandate is over”. Berwouts, “The Rise of the Street”, op. cit., July 2016. The Citizen Front 2016, begun in December 2015, was the first attempt to create a platform bringing social and political actors together. Crisis Group interviews, citizens, Kinshasa, September 2016.

important form of communication. Many are recorded in small studios in the *cités* and distributed around bars.⁴⁵

The DRC has an abundant media landscape, mostly in Kinshasa, with many publications, TV and radio stations. But most are owned by politicians and used for personal ends, which can include spreading confrontational messages and insulting foes. Several TV stations, including both owned by Moïse Katumbi, had their licences revoked in January 2016.⁴⁶ Some opposition groups maintain internet websites with hate messages and xenophobic opinions, such as accusations that Kabila is Rwandan, language often used at opposition protests.⁴⁷

4. The challenge of sustaining protests

Between late January 2015 and July 2016 opposition rallies and protest marches remained limited in scope, usually fewer than 10,000 in Kinshasa.⁴⁸ The cancelled February 2016 “March of the Christians” could have been different. A 31 July opposition rally organised immediately after Tshisekedi’s return to Kinshasa was the largest since the 2011 elections. No violent incidents were reported, because neither side wanted to risk a confrontation (see Section IV.B).

In 2016, the opposition has increasingly reverted to calling for *ville mortes*. The first, to replace the “March of Christians”, was generally well observed in cities like Kinshasa and Bukavu but failed in strategically important Lubumbashi, where the majority’s intimidation tactics limited its momentum. Several others were well observed, but the opposition seems to be aware this tactic must be used sparingly, as few people can afford to miss a day’s work. On 5 September, coinciding with the start of the school year, an *école morte* (school strike) was generally well observed, in particular in the *cités*, but some students stayed away because parents were not ready for them to begin school due to high fees, and others feared trouble. While many agree with the opposition that education is a pressing social issue, they worry about using children in the political struggle.⁴⁹

Several traditional parties and social organisations have called on people “to take responsibility” (*se prendre en charge*), often associating this with Article 64 of the constitution, which gives them responsibility to protect the constitution. The call also relates to the general absence of credible institutions and services that requires

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, UDPS official, Kinshasa, September 2016; Marie-Soleil Frère, *Elections et médias en Afrique centrale* (Paris, 2009). The UDPS particularly maintain strong links with these groups at several locations in Kinshasa. Crisis Group interviews, youth group, Masina municipality, young musicians and studio owner, Kinshasa, September 2016.

⁴⁶ The official reason for revoking the licenses of the two stations, Nyota TV and Radio TV Mapendo, was non-payment of taxes.

⁴⁷ Marie-Soleil Frère, “Le paysage médiatique congolais. Etat des lieux, enjeux et défis”, October 2008. “Congo: Une bataille électorale périlleuse”, Congo Research Group, August 2016, p. 27; Michael Fleshman, “RDC: les medias défendent la démocratie”, *Afrique Renouveau*, April 2007. Candide Okeke, “Le Rwanda Tire Les Ficelles: Mike Mbongo l’oeil et l’oreille de Ruberwa au sein de la dynamique de l’opposition”, *Apareco*, June 2016. Ann Garrison, “Congolese protest election delay: Non Kabila Rwandais” (www.anngarrison.com), 24 January 2015.

⁴⁸ There were also protests in Bukavu, Goma and Lubumbashi. Security forces have been permanently deployed throughout Lubumbashi to stamp down on protests.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, businessman, Lubumbashi, March 2016; Congolese academic, Kinshasa, September 2016; community and youth groups, Masina and Lingwala municipalities, Kinshasa, September 2016.

the public to care for all daily social needs. This has led to the creation of new social groups unaffiliated to parties or other large organisations.⁵⁰

The current context has already shown its potential for violence, including between the militants of parties participating in the dialogue and those not. As a result, those taking part in the dialogue neither want the participants list published nor wear their badges in public.⁵¹ There has also been a recent spread of violent incidents, including attacks on symbols of the state, some in response to local situations, others inspired by the political deadlock.⁵²

V. The Regime’s Response

A. *The Majority Fights Back*

The majority’s strategy has oscillated between using its control over state resources and repression and a more conciliatory dialogue. Wielding the stick and carrot, it has effectively exploited divisions among key opposition leaders.⁵³

Repression has increased markedly in 2015-2016, with particular focus on youth movements and the new opposition formed by majority dissidents, G7 and Moïse Katumbi. The UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO) documented 260 cases of “restriction of political space” in 2015 and 563 through 31 August 2016, most in Haut-Katanga, Kinshasa and North Kivu provinces. Several demonstrations were banned, had routes changed and/or were met with violence. The tactic that led CENCO to cancel the “March of the Christians” was to schedule majority rallies at the same time as opposition meetings. While demonstrations in Kinshasa were largely peaceful, at least until 19 September, several in Goma, Beni and, particularly, Lubumbashi turned violent. With Katumbi and several Katangese G7 parties joining the opposition, Lubumbashi’s political importance has increased.⁵⁴

Two factors informed the government’s temporary “softer” approach during Tshisekedi’s return on 27 July and the opposition rally on 31 July: the U.S. decision in June to sanction General Kanyama, the Kinshasa police commander, and prepa-

⁵⁰ Kibayu, “Portrait des quartiers populaires a Kinshasa”, op. cit. The slogan is complemented by others, such as “the fear has changed sides” and “the force of a united people is larger than an atomic bomb”.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, civil society participant in the dialogue, Kinshasa, September 2016.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, civil society representative, Kinshasa, September 2016. “DRC opposition calls for more protests despite recent deaths”, *The Guardian*, 23 September 2016. Recent incidents occurred in Kasumbalesa (Haut-Katanga), Kananga (Kasai central) and Kavumu (South Kivu). “RDC: le temps des jacqueries”, *La Libre Belgique*, 24 September 2016.

⁵³ The government was in talks with the UDPS until the latter allied with Moïse Katumbi and the G7, the *Rassemblement*. UNC leader Vital Kamerhe did not join that platform and participated in the dialogue that started on 1 September. The *Rassemblement* then considered him part of a new majority, “the majority of the Beatrice hotel” (where the preparatory talks were held). Crisis Group interview, opposition politician, Kinshasa, September 2016.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group Report, *Katanga*, op. cit.; “Dismantling dissent”, op. cit.; “Analysis of the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms linked to restrictions to the democratic space documented in August 2016”, UNJHRO document (undated). Crisis Group interviews, CENCO official, March, September 2016. Violence erupted in Lubumbashi during April and May protests, when Katumbi was being prosecuted on trumped-up charges. “RDC: manifestations de l’opposition, la situation dans le pays”, Radio Okapi, 26 May 2016. See also, Crisis Group Report, *Katanga*, op. cit.

rations for the dialogue.⁵⁵ In response to the oppositions’ “*yebela*” cry, the majority has used, less visibly, the call “*wumela*” (“stay longer”). The PPRD, Kabila’s party, has a new secretary general, Mova Sakanyi, and its offices, derelict a few years ago, are bustling with activity and sporting bold new banners. However, local inhabitants claim most visitors to them are paid per diem.⁵⁶

The majority has also recruited youths, reportedly from the urban gangs, to disturb other parties’ rallies, as during the 2011 elections. It has also been reaching out to youth groups, such as motorcycle taxi riders (*wewa*), by distributing free helmets and other gifts. This increasingly important form of transport also functions as an information network and is useful during protests, as it does not depend on the main avenues. Reportedly, the gifts have not bought much allegiance among *wewa* in Kinshasa, however, partly because many come from the Kasai provinces, Tshisekedi’s political base.⁵⁷

The government has increased its sovereignty and non-interference discourse, which is also nourished by an increasing degree of paranoia. From the majority’s perspective, the regime is facing an internationally-supported campaign to undermine it, including recent decisions about targeted sanctions and U.S. court proceedings detailing alleged corruption. After the U.S. sanctioned Kanyama, a Congolese National Television (RTNC) show denounced foreign interests wanting to keep control of the country. U.S. Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Thomas Perriello was verbally assaulted at Kinshasa airport on 18 September.

The regime also continues to push back on the political role of MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission, which despite some limited redeployment into urban centres, remains focused on armed groups in the East. Concerned about its image and even active efforts at regime change, the government does not support any MONUSCO move to cities outside the Kivus. Despite appearing composed and combative, however, many senior officials and ministers, sources indicate, are obtaining visas and hiding valuables lest protests escalate. Some Western embassies no longer issue them long-term visas.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The conciliatory stance included Kanyama meeting with Tshisekedi on arrival, to prepare his drive into the city. Crisis Group interviews, UDPS official, Kinshasa police commissioner, Kinshasa, September 2016. Dialogue preparations included releasing some political detainees and Kabila’s surprise meeting with *Lucha* activists in Goma. “Compte-rendu de notre rencontre avec le Président de la République, Joseph Kabila”, *Lucha* Facebook page, 19 August 2016. The U.S. sanctioned Kanyama for police violence against Congolese civilians. “Treasury Sanctions High-Ranking Government Security Official ...”, Press Center, U.S. treasury department, 23 June 2016.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Congolese academic, Kinshasa, July 2016; Lingwala municipality community group, Kinshasa, September 2016. The office banners include: “... the President of the Republic remains in office (Art. 70 of the Constitution, Art. 2)”. Similar messages appeared on billboards in Tanganyika province during the president’s visit in late June 2016.

⁵⁷ Habibou Bangré, “La Nouvelle Opposition en RDC: Les Mouvement Citoyens de la Jeunesse”, Observatoire de l’Afrique australe et des Grands Lacs, IFRI, March 2016, p. 18. Crisis Group interview, youth activist, Kinshasa, September 2016. “RD Congo: la ligue des jeunes du PPRD, un bloc 100% pro-Kabila”, *Jeune Afrique*, 26 May 2016.

⁵⁸ “RDC, Affaires Sanctions Ciblées: Suivez la Réponse de la RTNC et du Gouvernement”, YouTube Video, 3 July 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkciT3V6eK4. The sanctions were called “the new version of the *chicotte* [a colonial-era whip]”. “Alarm Over Protests and Harassment of the U.S. Special Envoy in the DRC”, press statement, U.S. State Department, 19 September. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Congolese politicians and officials, Kinshasa, July 2016.

B. *A Very Thin Blue Line: Repression and the Security Forces*

UNJHRO and Amnesty International reports point to increased repression by the Congolese National Police (PNC) and domestic intelligence service (ANR). The armed forces (FARDC), in particular the Republican Guard (GR), have been deployed to help police quell unrest, particularly during the January 2015 protest and again on 19 September 2016. The presidency tightly controls the ANR, GR and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the PNC, mostly bypassing civilian structures in the process, and also uses the judiciary against its opponents. Its *Maison Militaire*, led by long-time Kabila confidant General François Olenga, has a central role.⁵⁹ The military’s 2014 organisational reform put loyal officers at the head of key military regions: Maj. General Gabriël Amisi (now sanctioned by the U.S.) in Kinshasa and Jean-Claude Kifwa, the president’s nephew, in Lubumbashi. Former police commander, Lt. General John Numbi was also recently sanctioned by the U.S. for his role in repression in the former Katanga province.⁶⁰

The PNC has been responsible for most human rights violations. Its failure to respond in January 2015 and September 2016 led to the GR’s deployment in Kinshasa. Lessons learned after 2015 included the installation of video surveillance equipment in several sensitive locations.⁶¹ In the increasing tension during the September dialogue, riot control units were visibly stationed at key locations and major transport axes in Kinshasa. MONUSCO and others have provided crowd control training, and the PNC has purchased non-lethal riot control equipment (such as water cannons). However, in the first days of the September riots, the water cannons were reportedly hardly used; instead, the government escalated the response role to the armed forces, as the police had difficulty coping.⁶²

Police morale is poor, undermined by low salaries and bad housing conditions (the intervention police mostly live in barracks). Their social position is seriously

⁵⁹ UNJHRO, op. cit.; “Dismantling dissent”, op. cit.; Crisis Group email correspondence, Kinshasa-based lawyer, September 2016; security expert, Nairobi, October 2016. “U.N. Criticizes Congo for Response to Deadly Unrest”, *The New York Times*, 22 September 2016. The judiciary is involved in suits against the G7 and Katumbi. “RDC Congo: une juge de Lubumbashi affirme avoir subi des pressions pour faire condamner Katumbi”, *Jeune Afrique*, 27 July 2016; Crisis Group Report, *Katanga*, op. cit. Olenga is also key in the military’s logistical network, via long contacts in Eastern Europe.

⁶⁰ “FARDC: la liste des officiers généraux et supérieurs nommés à la tête des grandes unités militaires”, *Forum des As*, 19 September 2014; Crisis Group email correspondence, local analyst, September 2016. Maj. General Amisi, sanctioned by the U.S. in September 2016, also chairs the popular Kinshasa football team, AS Vita Club, which gives him a strong profile, but not necessarily popularity. “Treasury Sanctions Two Individuals for Threatening the Stability and Undermining ...”, Press Center, U.S. treasury department, 28 September 2016. “RD Congo: Foot, business & politique”, *Jeune Afrique*, 7 August 2016.

⁶¹ UNJHRO, op. cit. The 19-22 January 2016 protest was preceded by violently repressed smaller incidents. The intensity and spread were surprising. Police were ill-equipped so quickly used firearms, further fuelling the protest. Crisis Group interview, civil society member, Kinshasa, September 2016. Social media showed that several video installations were destroyed during the 19 September 2016 riots.

⁶² Crisis Group observation, Kinshasa, September 2016; interview, UN official, Kinshasa, September 2016. “Kinshasa: la police présente de nouveaux véhicules anti-émeute”, Radio Okapi, 14 September 2016. Crisis Group email correspondence, diplomat, September 2016. “Kabila chez le Pape, Kinshasa sous le choc”, *Le Soir*, 27 September 2016. The national police officials and Kinshasa police commissioner Crisis Group interviewed just before 19 September expressed confidence they could handle demonstrations without the military.

undermined by their tendency to harass and extort. People have intimidated policemen and their families living in the *cités*.⁶³ Targeted sanctions on officers, such as those imposed by the U.S., may deter abuses and sap morale, though hardliners such as General Kanyama have wide support in the service.

FARDC is deployed mostly in the East. The division-size GR is in urban centres, notably Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, and strategic locations such as airports. It has heavier weapons than other forces, which are lightly armed, if at all. GR in Kinshasa reportedly received police training recently, and there are persistent rumours they have PNC uniforms, but there are loyalty concerns. GR, including those at sensitive locations, have a reputation for petty corruption, as rank and file salaries are not much higher than those of other FARDC units. Because many GR are from Katanga, there are also fears its unity could be weakened by the defection of Katangese parties and politicians from the majority.⁶⁴ Commanders allegedly warned the government in January 2015 of a limit to what the military could do. In a demonstration of the lack of trust between elements of the security forces, several military and PNC camps in Kinshasa were searched by GR and military police for weapons and looted goods after the massive September 2016 protest.

The ANR has increasingly been used as a secret police. This very powerful institution is present countrywide and is a highly centralised parallel administration. It has focused on youth groups, such as *Lucha*, and operations against the parties and individuals that have left the majority. For example, it blacklisted and harassed businesses and interests associated with Katumbi. The rival military intelligence service (Etat-Major Renseignement) on occasions has zealously engaged in political repression, most notoriously when it arrested opposition politician Martin Fayulu.⁶⁵

The increased capability and use of sticks and carrots against the opposition indicate a centrally-managed strategy. But competition between services, some haphazard actions and messy execution of repression point to considerable command and control problems that could allow violence to escalate quickly. The September 2016 protests ended a period of relative calm, and the regime is now likely to react more vigorously against the instigators of protests.⁶⁶

VI. Conclusion: The Way Ahead

With rising political tension, the unpredictable variable is the urban population, which reappeared as a major political factor with the January 2015 protest. Since then, civil society and opposition parties have tried to rally public support to push the government to respect the constitution and organise elections, but they and the regime have only limited control over the largely impoverished, frustrated population, and the potential for violence was again demonstrated on 19-20 September. The most comprehensive way to prevent protest and urban violence is to break the political

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, youth activist, Kinshasa, September 2016.

⁶⁴ See also, Crisis Group Report, *Katanga*, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, businessman, Kinshasa, September 2016; diplomat, Kinshasa, March 2016. “RDC: Retour sur l’arrestation et la libération du député Martin Fayulu”, RFI, 14 February 2016.

⁶⁶ There are already indications of people involved in the September protests disappearing. Crisis Group email correspondence with Kinshasa-based activist and diplomat, October 2016.

deadlock. Broad consensus between political and social actors is urgently needed. This was an important part of CENCO’s argument when it suspended its participation in the political dialogue.⁶⁷ The dialogue as launched had merits, but did not inspire the necessary confidence.

Since the violence of September, Angola and South Africa are increasingly concerned about the capacity of the Congolese security forces to control the situation, and they have met at senior levels to discuss the DRC crisis.⁶⁸ Major international actors, including these regional powers, have to increase their involvement and use all their diplomatic and financial tools to help Congolese negotiate an agreement that ends political polarisation and concentrates on organising elections with a specified, tight timetable.⁶⁹ Compromise is also required on who governs after 19 December and with what powers. Internationals can use good offices, targeted sanctions, the threat of withdrawing UN troops, especially the FIB, and other coercive measures to push needed compromises. The government’s recurring declarations that it wants MONUSCO to withdraw are mainly for domestic political reasons. In the field, MONUSCO’s logistical support of FARDC remains important. The FIB, mostly composed of troops of allied countries (Tanzania and South Africa), provides a reassuring security tripwire in the East at the sensitive border with Rwanda.

The opposition demand to lead a two-year transition and the majority desire for a seemingly endless extension of the current regime both lack legal and political foundation. Insisting on them would only polarise opinion and make violence more likely. An agreement requires nuance, flexibility and the active buy-in of regional and continental actors that have sat on the sidelines too long.

Both sides continue to engage in uncompromising language, inspiring hate and violence, delegitimising protests and potentially generating hard-to-control public rage. Measures are needed, as the parties negotiate, that can reduce the risk of violence and lessen the impact of polarising messages. Sanctions should target those from regime and opposition alike who call for and orchestrate violence.

It is vital in the difficult months ahead to protect media freedoms. Credible outlets such as RFI and Radio Okapi should be supported, not closed in times of unrest, but free expression must be balanced with responsibility. All leaders have primary responsibility not to disseminate inflammatory messages. Institutions tasked to monitor media, such as the Superior Audiovisual and Communication Council (CSAC), should be strengthened and grassroots mechanisms re-activated or initiated to monitor and discourage provocative pronouncements.⁷⁰ Diplomats, the UN and other internationals must engage with the urban communities to discourage violence and carry the core message that political protest is legitimate but encouraging and manipulating violence is not.

There should be increased monitoring of and support for the police and other security forces. This is an area for the UN, which is engaged in capacity building, and the EU and other bilateral partners that have engaged in SSR programs and could

⁶⁷ CENCO communiqué, 20 September 2016.

⁶⁸ “Angola: Message du Président sud-africain à son homologue angolais”, ANGOP, 3 October 2016; “RDC: sommet international en Angola pour trouver une sortie de crise”, RFI, 6 October 2016

⁶⁹ Crisis Group statement, “A Nuanced but Firm Political Approach”, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Created in 2011, CSAC is meant to ensure fair access for parties, associations and individuals to official information and media but is seriously under-resourced and lacks political weight. “Congo: Une bataille électorale périlleuse”, Congo Research Group, August 2016, p. 27.

build on experience and trust. No social movement has the leadership or following to manage a non-violent popular revolution. As tensions spiral ever higher, ways out will become fewer, hence the critical need to work in parallel toward a political solution and reduction of the scope for violence in the short term.

Nairobi/Brussels, 13 October 2016

Appendix A: Map of Democratic Republic of Congo



Appendix B: Terms and Acronyms

ANR	National Intelligence Agency.
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission, led by Corneille Nangaa since November 2015.
CENCO	National Episcopal Conference of the Congo.
CNS	National Sovereign Conference.
CPP	Popular Power Committees.
CSAC	Superior Audiovisual and Communication Council.
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo.
DSP	Mobutu’s Special Presidential Division (elite unit in the army during Mobutu regime).
EU	European Union.
EUFOR RDC	European Force for the DRC.
<i>Filimbi</i>	“Whistle”, an activist youth group.
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
G7	Opposition group formed by majority dissidents ACO, UNADEF, UNAFEC, MSDD, ARC, MSR and PDC.
GR	Republican Guard, elite unit of the Congolese armed forces.
<i>Kuluna</i>	Urban Gangs.
<i>Lucha</i>	Lutte pour le changement, youth movement.
M23	March 23 Movement.
MLC	Movement for the Liberation of Congo.
MONUC	UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1999 to July 2010.
MONUSCO	United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since July 2010.
PALU	Unified Lumumbist Party, political party, allied to the majority.
PNC	Congolese National Police.
PPRD	Peoples’ Party for Reconstruction and Development (majority).
Rassemblement	Opposition platform, created near Brussels in June 2016, led by the UDPS and supported by Moïse Katumbi.
RTNC	Congolese National Television.
SSR	Security Sector Reform.
<i>Telema</i>	“Arise” or “Stand-up”, an opposition cry.
UDPS	Union for Democracy and Social Progress, opposition political party led by Etienne Tshisekedi.
UN	United Nations.
UNJHRO	UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC.
UNC	Union for the Congolese Nation (opposition).
UNILU	University of Lubumbashi.
<i>Wewa</i>	Motorcycle taxi riders.
<i>Wumela</i>	“Stay longer”, a cry of Kabila’s partisans.
<i>Yebela</i>	“Know-it”, that is that your mandate is about to expire, an opposition cry.



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