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Gov. Katumbi Reaffirms His Commitment to DRC as Voters Look Forward to Elections

Craig Stevens

Good Morning—

Citizens and potential candidates in the Democratic Republic of Congo are becoming increasingly engaged as the first presidential elections in 7 years are scheduled for **December 23, 2018.**

A poll conducted by the Congo Research Group at New York University found that **95 percent** of eligible voters plan to cast their ballots in the election and 8 out of every 10 voters have an unfavorable opinion of the current president, Joseph Kabila.

1. President Kabila, presumably understanding that his support hovers around 20 percent, is doing what he can to put his finger on the scales – contradicting the values of free, fair, and transparent elections. For example, the president announced last week that it would refuse international support for the overdue election, saying “donors’ conditions amounted to ‘foreign interference’.” This tactic has renewed international concern that the election in December will be fraudulent.

One purported requirement from the U.S. came last month, from U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley who told an informal U.N. Security Council meeting, that “These elections must be held by paper ballots so there is no question by the Congolese people about the results. The U.S. has no appetite to support an electronic voting system.”

2. And Pres. Kabila continues to poke at one of his chief rivals, former Governor Moise Katumbi. President Kabila and his forces have threatened and beaten Mr. Katumbi; leveled false charges against him and forced judges to rule against him (which one judge has subsequently recanted, explaining she was threatened and coerced); and now Kabila is alleging that the Governor holds foreign citizenship – thereby disqualifying him from running in the election. An ironic allegation, considering Kabila currently sits in an office that, according to the DRC Constitution, he should have abdicated sixteen months ago and as the President, himself, refuses to give Gov. Katumbi a Congolese passport.

Governor Katumbi responded to Kabila’s latest allegation in a video and Tweet posted on Twitter saying (translated), “I, a native of the Katanga, son of a Princess Bemba/Yeke of the Msiri lineage, King of the Bayekes...MP and Governor... This only reinforces my willingness to save the DRC and I’m still running for president.”

3. Despite Pres. Kabila’s attempts, opposition leaders are moving forward to organize.

In a speech outlining his vision for a free DRC, Gov. Katumbi reiterated his commitment to unite the Congolese people and fight for change in his country in his pledge two weeks ago, stating “Countrymen and countrywomen of Congo, dear sisters, dear brothers, the evolution of our country leads me to share with you my vision of the future and to propose to take a new path of action. I became involved in politics to defend the founding values of our nation. Unity, peace, justice, and work. I have also committed to offer our children a better future, through better education and good jobs. Giving families the capacity to have access to food and housing in a safe environment. In other words, enabling all Congolese people to live in peace and dignity.”

And Felix Tshisekedi, the son of the founder of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress