

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



OF CONGO HISTORY

Early History

1300s

The Kongo empire, a highly structured and developed state, rules over a region that today covers parts of south-western Congo, northern Angola and a slice of the Republic of Congo. It lasts for some 500 years.

1500s

Atlantic slave trade impacts Kongo. Over the next 300 years, more than 5 million slaves are captured from within several hundred miles on either side of the Congo River mouth with most shipped to Brazil. In 1526, Kongo's King Afonso sends a letter to the Portuguese King João III imploring him to end the practice, stating his country is being "depopulated."

The Belgians

1870s

Belgium's King Leopold II starts his colonial project in central Africa.

1885

Leopold announces establishment of the Congo Free State, under his direct control.

1880-90s

The Kuba kingdom resists against the foreign invaders, although Leopold's agents eventually enforce their authority. The Kuba continue to fight against the regime.

1908

Following immense pressure from the Congo Reform Association's campaign, Leopold sells control of Congo to the Belgian state. Later academic research finds that during Leopold's rule and its immediate aftermath, Congo's population may have been slashed by as many as 10 million people. Life for Congo's inhabitants continues with only minimal improvements.

MINERALS & LABOR

1913

Industrial mining of copper begins in Katanga province. Diamonds are discovered in Kasai.

1935

Forced labor continues though less murderous than before. Belgium government sets a requirement that all Congolese must do 60 days of compulsory labor each year. **1941**

First labor strikes in major cities which are brutally repressed.

1942

Belgian government increases the forced labor requirement to 120 days per year.

1959

Anti-colonial riots in Kinshasa (then called Leopoldville) with demands for independence from Belgium.

Independence

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June 1960

Congo gains independence. Before the handover, Belgium robs the treasury and transfers the debt to the new Congolese government. Patrice Lumumba wins Congo's first elections and becomes the coalition government's prime minister. He attempts to steer a neutral course between the United States and the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War.

September 1960

Lumumba is removed from power and arrested in a coup d'état led by Col. Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, with encouragement from Belgium and the United States.

1965

Mobutu seizes power in a CIA-backed coup and brutally cracks down on political rivals, hanging some in public executions. He remains president of Congo for 32 years.

1966 - Mobutu nationalizes mining and redistributes foreign-country management to a local elite, mostly friends and family. He squanders and embezzles billions of dollars through trade in copper, cobalt, diamonds and coffee.

New Fame

1971

Mobutu changes his name to Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga (which translates as: The allpowerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake) and renames the country Zaire. He gains unquestioned support from the US government by siding with the US during the Cold War and allowing his country to be used as a springboard for operations against Soviet-backed Angola. He receives substantial US financial assistance.

1974

American boxers Muhammad Ali and George Foreman fight the "rumble in the jungle" in Zaire. Ali, who wins the fight, says he wanted to establish a relationship between African-Americans and Africa.

1991

With the cold war over, the US government finds its alliance with authoritarian Mobutu embarrassing. Mobutu is forced to open up the country to multiparty democracy and permits a National Sovereign Conference to discuss the transition. For some 15 months, the country's political leadership discusses the political, economic and social situation. Following the conference, Mobutu appoints a transitional government but remains president and holds on to substantial powers.

War

April 1994

Rwanda's Hutu extremist government orchestrates a genocide of some 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu. When Tutsi rebels take control of Rwanda, over a million Hutu - including many of the leaders who directed the genocide - take refuge in camps across the border in Zaire. **July 1994**

An estimated 50,000 people die when cholera spreads through the huge, squalid refugee camps in eastern Zaire.

November 1996 - May 1997

The Rwandan army, in support of an anti-Mobutu rebel group, the Alliance for Democratic Liberation (AFDL), attack the refugee camps in eastern Zaire and march on the capital, Kinshasa, while Mobutu is abroad for medical treatment. Tens of thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees flee westwards into Zaire's forests pursued by Rwandan army soldiers.

May 1997

Mobutu flees into exile. With minimal resistance, the AFDL rebels and the Rwandan army seize Kinshasa, and Laurent Kabila, the rebel leader, is installed as president. The country is renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo.

September 1997

Mobutu dies of prostate cancer in exile in Morocco. The government does not permit his body to return for burial in Congo.

Fighting for Peace

August 1998

President Laurent Kabila demands that his Rwandan army backers leave the country. Kabila purges Tutsi from his government and whips up anti-Tutsi sentiment in an attempt to show his independence from Rwanda. Less than a week later, Rwandan and Ugandan armies invade Congo, backing a hastily formed Congolese rebel group seeking to oust Kabila.

August 1998

President Kabila receives support from Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola and repels an attempt by the Rwandan and Ugandan armies to take Kinshasa, though they and their allied rebel groups remain in control of large parts of eastern Congo. Fighting continues and the Rwanda Hutu militia, ALIR, joins Kabila's side.

June 2000

Former allies Uganda and Rwanda battle for six days for control of Kisangani, one of Congo's main cities, leaving some 700 civilians dead. A UN investigation concludes the two armies committed war crimes and calls on Uganda and Rwanda to pay reparations. No action is taken by either government. The top Rwandan officer involved in the battle, Karenzi Karake, is later appointed deputy commander of the UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur.

January 2001

President Laurent Kabila is assassinated by a bodyguard. After days of uncertainty, his 29-year-old son Joseph takes office. A flawed military trial later found 90 people guilty of involvement in the assassination, including some of Laurent Kabila's close allies.

Transition

July 2003

The transitional government is sworn in with Joseph Kabila as interim president. Democratic elections are scheduled to be held within two years. Fighting continues in the east.

May/June 2004

Tutsi renegade general, Laurent Nkunda, with support from Rwanda, takes control of the eastern town of Bukavu (South Kivu) claiming to protect Tutsi civilians under attack. MONUC peacekeepers fail to halt Nkunda's advance. After intense diplomatic pressure, Nkunda withdraws from Bukavu four days later, but across the country MONUC staff are attacked by angry crowds protesting the UN's failure to act.

July 2005

Elections due to be held in 2005 are delayed. Thousands of demonstrators protest in Kinshasa but are dispersed with tear gas.

June 2006

Election campaigning begins in Congo's first multiparty elections in over 40 years. 33 presidential candidates compete for the top job. Joseph Kabila is the favorite to win.

November 2006

Election results announced. Kabila wins 58 percent of the vote to Bemba's 42 percent. Bemba files a legal challenge alleging vote rigging by the Kabila camp, and more violence ensues. Kabila's victory is upheld by the Supreme Court and Bemba reluctantly accepts the decision.

December 2006

Joseph Kabila sworn in as president.

2007 September - Major outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus.

2011 November - Presidential and parliamentary elections. Mr Kabila gains another term. The vote is criticised abroad and the opposition disputes the result.

2015 January - Dozens killed in protests against proposed electoral law changes which the opposition said were designed to allow President Kabila to remain in power.

2016 November - A political deal signed between President Kabila's ruling coalition and the opposition to delay the presidential election until 2018 sees Prime Minister Augustin Matata Ponyo and his cabinet resign, paving the way for a new cabinet to include opposition figures.

2017 December - DR Congo is experiencing a "mega-crisis", with conflict having forced 1.7 million people to flee their homes during the year, aid agencies say. DR Congo is worst-affected by conflict displacement

Controversial Elections

2018 March - Main opposition Union for Democracy and Social Progress chooses Felix Tshisekedi as its candidate for the December presidential election.

2018 June - Government asks commissions to look at declassifying parts of Virunga and Salonga national parks, both Unesco World Heritage Sites, for oil exploration. Environmentalists claim drilling would endanger wildlife and contribute to global warming.

2018 August - Governing People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy chooses former interior minister Ramazani Shadary as its presidential candidate, as President Kabila cannot run for another term.

2019 January - Officials declare opposition candidate Felix Tshisekedi the winner of December's presidential election, prompting protests from rival opposition candidate Martin Fayulu of a deal with the government, whose candidate Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary came third.