

MEDIA RELEASE

Congo: The Electoral Process Seen From the East

Kinshasa/Nairobi/Brussels, 5 September 2011: The technical preparations for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled on 28 November and the beginning of the electoral campaign in the East of Congo have generated suspicion that risks developing into a crisis of confidence in the whole electoral process.

[*Congo: The Electoral Process Seen from the East*](#), the latest briefing from the International Crisis Group, examines voter registration and the beginning of the campaign on the ground in the Kivu provinces and the Ituri district and highlights the electoral stakes in a region that remains fundamental for durable stability in the country.

“The militiamen of the armed groups have not disturbed the voter registration process because they also need the voters’ card which serves as an ID document in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, says Marc-André Lagrange, Crisis Group’s Senior Congo Analyst. “However, the surprisingly sharp increase in the electorate the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced, lack of dialogue with the political parties and lack of verification by the voters themselves feed latent but widespread suspicions in the opposition and civil society”.

In the electoral context, the Ituri district and the North and South Kivu provinces are key areas for two reasons: they are the sole part of the Congo still harboring armed groups, and they provided an important reservoir of votes for the ruling party in the 2006 elections. However, the political landscape has changed in this region: an opposition party has emerged – the Congolese Union for the Nation led by Vital Kamerhe, the former chair of the National Assembly – and the popularity of the government is falling due to persistent insecurity.

To ensure credible elections, it is necessary to improve transparency, respect the electoral law and establish a forum for dialogue between INEC, the parties and civil society. The international community should observe the entire electoral process in detail, particularly in rural areas. The INEC should scrupulously respect the electoral code, especially regarding accreditation of observers, and establish a formal platform for dialogue with political parties and civil society at both national and provincial level. The presidential majority and the opposition should, for the contingency that postponement of the elections cannot be avoided, negotiate an agreement that sets a new deadline for them and provides that government would limit itself to routine business until they are held.

The code of conduct introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN should be accepted by all stakeholders in the electoral process, and the UN mission in the Congo (MONUSCO) should encourage a more sustained respect for political freedom and dialogue between INEC, the political parties and civil society at national and provincial level, as dialogue is a key element in building trust. MONUSCO should also continue to deploy its troops in the areas where the armed groups are active and reinforce its logistical support for the coming distribution of the electoral material.

“Due to the asymmetry of political forces, local politicians regard the presidential election as already decided in the East and the main stakes to be the legislative and provincial elections”, says Thierry Vircoulon, Crisis Group’s Central Africa Project Director. “At this stage, electoral transparency and confidence building between the electoral authorities, the political parties and civil society are the key elements to ensure a peaceful vote and recognition of the electoral results by the Congolese people”.

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