

Don't Let the DRC Go Up in Flames Romeo Dallaire, Frank Chalk and Kyle Matthews Ottawa Citizen

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(...) On Nov. 28, 18 million Congolese turned out to cast their ballots in the Democratic Republic of Congo's presidential and legislative elections, standing in line patiently for hours in the pouring rain, hoping for the best despite flawed voters' lists, late deliveries of ballots, and attempts at intimidation. (...)

In a perfect world, the Congolese would find their reward. But the DRC is far from a perfect world. It is a complex and a multi-layered country. What began on Dec. 2 as a trickle of stories reporting widespread voting irregularities observed by election monitors of the European Union and the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa has turned into a flood.

The two leading candidates are the sitting president, Joseph Kabila, and Étienne Tshisekedi, nearly 79 years old, who casts himself as a zealous reformer. Citing unacceptable certification of impossibly high rates of voter turnout in multiple locations where nearly all votes went to incumbent Kabila, the Carter Center has delivered the coup de grace to claims of a clean Kabila victory, concluding that the provisional election results announced by the DRC's Independent National Commission (CENI) "lack credibility" and lending credence to opposition charges that Pastor Daniel Ngoy Mulunda, the election commission chair, is biased by his blood relationship to the Kabila family. (...)

The Archbishop of Kinshasa, informed by reports from election monitors, declared on Monday that the Election Commission's report conformed neither to truth nor justice.

So where do we go from here? An outbreak of mass violence in the streets of Kinshasa and other large cities in the DRC led by a suddenly unified opposition is a definite possibility. Worrisome signs are everywhere.

According to informed sources in Kinshasa, soldiers belonging to the violence-prone and trigger happy Republican Guards surround the house of Tshisekedi. More than 3,000 persons, many of them politicians, have fled Kinshasa for Brazzaville, the capital of the neighbouring Republic of Congo, and more are fleeing every day. (...)

We recommend the following actions:

1) The election results must not be recognized by other governments, which should pay heed to the excellent advice of British MP Eric Joyce, who chairs the United Kingdom's All Party African Great Lakes group. Joyce was one of the first to allege that President Kabila had stolen the election. (...)

2) Verifying the presidential election result by checking against the minutes from each individual polling station signed by the official election monitors, is crucial. A high-profile panel of senior African leaders - supported by the African Union and the United Nations - should supervise the recount process and, once the winner is determined, mediate disputes arising from the election results.

3) Ottawa and Canadian diplomats in Central Africa, joined by the United States government, should pressure the government of Democratic Republic of Congo to protect the lives of all presidential candidates and remind them that the International Criminal Court is already prosecuting politicians from Kenya and Ivory Coast who allegedly promoted or failed to stop political violence. Pre-emptive roundups of political activists in Kinshasa and other cities must stop.

4) Whichever candidate comes out the winner following a peaceful and transparent ballot-counting process and mediation, the defeated candidate should be assisted to exit gracefully. Winners and losers need to act on the wise words in Accra, Ghana last July of President Barack Obama: "Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions." (...)

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from the International Federation for Human Rights: "Tensions in the DRC: MONUSCO Must Act Before Having to React"