



FLORIDA CENTER FOR SURVIVORS OF TORTURE

Inspiring Hope and Understanding

Democratic Republic of the Congo

TIMELINE

1885 -1908 - After King Leopold of Belgium acquires rights to the Congo, roughly 10 million Congolese die because of foreign exploitation and disease. Belgium renames the territory The Belgian Congo.

1960 – After Belgium eventually agrees to hold new elections and cede power to the winning party, a general election is held and Patrice Lumumba, is declared Prime Minister of the First Republic.

September 14, 1960 – With assistance from the CIA, Army Chief of Staff Joseph Mobutu stages a military coup and murders Patrice Lumumba.

1971 – Mobutu renames it The Republic of Zaire.

1973-74 - Mobutu nationalizes many foreign-owned companies and forces out foreign investors.

1989 – Belgium cancels development programs after Zaire defaults on loans, which increases the corrosion of the economy.

1990 - Mobutu agrees to allow multi-party politics and a transitional government, but maintains power.

1991 – A riot by unpaid soldiers leads Mobutu to support a coalition government with opposition leaders, but he retains control of security and vital ministries.

1996—1997 - Laurent Kabila takes over the government, with the help of anti-Mobutu rebels and Angola, Burundi, Eritrea, Rwanda, and Uganda, while Mobutu is out of the country. Zaire is renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

1998 – Kabila attempts to expel all foreign troops from the DRC. The Second Congolese War begins as new troops enter from Rwanda and Uganda with the intention of replacing Kabila with the Rwanda backed RCD (Rally for Congolese Democracy). Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe intervene and back Kabila leading the RCD to withdraw and establish control over parts of the east of the DRC.

1999 - At the beginning of the year, after the MLC (Movement for the Liberation of the Congo) backed by Uganda takes control over the Northern third of the DRC, foreign governments agree to a ceasefire agreement. However, by the end of the year the situation deteriorates because of the failure of the the parties to fully implement the agreement.

2000 – UN Security Council calls all parties to stop hostilities and demands that Rwanda and Uganda withdraw.

2001— Laurent Kabila is assassinated and his son Joseph becomes president. 2.5 million people are estimated to have been killed since 1998. UN claims the parties are intentionally prolonging the conflict in order to profit from the natural resources of gold, diamonds, timber, and coltan.

2002 August – A new peace and power sharing agreement is signed in the hopes of ending the war.



2003- A transitional government is set up with Kabila remaining the president and the rebel group leaders acting as vice presidents. The Second Congo War is officially declared over.

2004 – Sporadic violence erupts within the army and between government forces and rebel forces. UN deploys 5,900 peacekeepers to assist with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

2005 – Voters support the new constitution opening the way for the 2006 elections. The International Court of Justice declares the Uganda must compensate the DRC for human rights abuses and resource depletion. Three mass graves are discovered in North Kivu.

2006 – For the first time in over 40 years, multi-party elections are held. However, after no clear winner emerges between Kabila and Jean-Pierre Bemba, a run-off election leads to Kabila's inauguration as fighting breaks out between those loyal to their candidate. The UN declares its intention to map out the human rights violations in the DRC committed between 1993 and 2003.

2007 – Clashes continue between government troops and Bemba loyalists. Kabila accepts UN mapping exercise.

2008 – Violence erupts between the army and UN troops, and a rebel group led by Congolese Tutsi leader Nkunda after the Goma peace agreement fails. Rwanda is accused, but denies supporting Nkunda. Twenty UN human rights experts begin the mapping exercise in order to understand the violations and the context in which they occurred. The task was not to punish perpetrators, but rather to expose through transparency the extent of the violations in order to break cycle of impunity.

2009 – Congolese and Rwandan forces operate against Hutu rebels in eastern DRC. Nkunda is arrested in Rwanda as he attempts to evade government forces targeting his group. Egypt announces support of MONUC and plans to send 1,000 soldiers.



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TORTURE METHODS

MASS KILLING has occurred because of ethnic makeup, political persuasion, fear of reprisal by the perpetrators and by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) to keep the government from finding their camps after kidnappings. Many victims of abduction have been forced to kill other victims for attempting to escape the LRA.

RAPE is systematically used by militia groups, the national army, and even by UN troops to torture and to terrorize the civilian population. The victims of rape are stigmatized by the community and their families. Women are considered tainted. Often husbands leave them and place the blame on the victims rather than the perpetrators.

BEATINGS are commonly used against civilians as punishment for colluding with the enemy and in order to get victims to carry out the wishes of the perpetrators. Child soldiers are routinely beaten into submission.

MUTILATIONS have been used by militia groups and national military members against civilians in front of their families and to the point of death. Mutilations are used to send a signal to those in the resource mines to meet quotas. When quotas are not met, workers body parts are cut off as punishment and as a sign to others. In addition, mutilations are used as warning signs that anyone who speaks negatively about their group will be punished.

FORCED MARCHING has been used primarily by militia groups who capture civilians including children, tie them together at the waist with ropes or metal wires, force them to carry supplies and use them as human shields. Often adults are killed or set free, children are kept and forced to kill family members and neighbors, those who attempt to escape, are tired or weak, and those considered disposable.

KIDNAPPING of adults and children is a tool of militia groups, especially the LRA to force boys to fight and girls into sexual slavery.

ROBBERY, DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY, and looting are other tools used by many groups including the army to terrorize civilians into submission.

DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALIZATION occurs in staggering numbers against rape victims, indigenous groups, and those in extreme poverty. Restricting food and water is used to terrorize political victims, child soldiers, and marginalized indigenous groups.

CURRENT SITUATION

Since the start of fighting in 1998, over 5.5 million people have died and continue to die at staggering rates. Many victims have been displaced people who died from exposure, hunger, or lack of medical assistance. Almost half of the deaths have been children. Approximately 45,000 still continue to die each month. While some people are returning home, there are about 1.5 million internally displaced people or refugees. Approximately 1.3 million households are experiencing serious food insecurity.

The conflict in the DRC is comprised of both interstate and intrastate conflicts that morph from one to the other. Foreign militaries inside the DRC have attempted to bring peace and at the same time have fostered violent ethnic conflict.

The security situation is reportedly deteriorating in the North Kivu region with cases of extortion, rape, and assassination by armed militias. Local civilians fear the withdrawal of Congo troops and the threats of Ugandan rebels. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has continued terrorizing civilians through rape, murder, kidnapping, looting, arson, property destruction, robbery, and forced conscription of minors. While the LRA hinders repatriation of displaced people, repatriation continues for refugees inside the DRC to their home countries and displaced citizens outside the DRC back to their communities.

Between May and September of 2010, Human Rights Watch interviewed hundreds of victims of the LRA in an attempt to appeal to international leaders for assistance. The LRA has killed 2,385 and kidnapped over 3054 since September of 2008 according to Human Rights Watch and United Nations documents. However, with attacks occurring in many remote villages, it is likely that the numbers could be much higher.

Currently, the LRA is believed to be operating in the border areas of Northern Congo, the Central African Republic, and Southern Sudan and consists of 200 to 400 armed combatants and hundreds of abductees. It does not have clear political goals and very little popular support.

Greed and profit from the trade in minerals is one of the main motives of the armed groups on all sides of the conflict, particularly in the east of Congo. These groups earn hundreds of millions of dollars each year by trading many minerals, including coltan, cassiterite, tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold. With the many, the militias are able to buy large caches of weapons and to continue their violent assault against the civilian population. The worst human rights violations occur in the mining area. Most of these minerals are used by industrial countries in electronic devices.