



# CONGO

## AN OVERVIEW OF ITS GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND POLITICS

### GEOGRAPHY

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is literally and figuratively the heart of Africa. The country of an estimated 70 million people straddles the equator and is bordered by 9 other countries. It is the size of Western Europe and the fulcrum on which the African continent swings. Congo is the second largest country in Africa in area and the fourth largest in population. Congo is a young country with the majority of its population 18 years old or younger.

### HISTORY & POLITICS

Congo is home to one of the oldest mathematical artifacts in the world, the Ishango Bones, a binary counting system and lunar calendar, which dates to 20,000 B.C. Pre-colonial Congo region was governed by federated states. However, since the modern founding of the Congo in 1885 when Congo was given to King Leopold II of Belgium at the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 as his own personal property, Congolese have been engaged in a social justice movement to control and determine their own affairs.

### WHY CONGO MATTERS

Congo is arguably the richest country on the planet in terms of natural resources. It is the storehouse of strategic and precious minerals that are vital to the functioning of modern society. Its minerals are key to the consumer electronics industry, the technology industry, automotive, aerospace and military industries. Its diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, uranium, timber, iron, tin, tungsten, and coltan (mineral that is central to the functioning of our cell phones, laptops and other technology and electronic devices) are coveted from China to United States.

Due to Congo's strategic location in the heart of Africa and the lust for her wealth powerful nations have repeatedly intervened in the Congo over the past 125 years. Congo is vital to the future of the African continent. Former South African president Thabo Mbeki says "there is no new Africa without a new Congo." And President Obama proclaims, "If Africa is to achieve its promise resolving the problem in the Congo will be critical."

### CONGO'S POTENTIAL

In spite of the remarkable challenges faced by the Congolese people, those challenges can be overcome, especially in light of Congo's incredible human and natural potential. Congo has the agricultural potential to feed the entire African continent. Congo also has the hydro capacity to provide electricity to the entire African continent with some left over to export to Southern Europe and the Middle East. Congo is a part of the second largest rainforest in the world and is vital to the fight against climate change.

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## PIVOTAL MOMENTS IN CONGO'S HISTORY SINCE 1885

- 1884 to 1885 Berlin Conference, Congo given to King Leopold II as his own personal property.
- 1885 to 1908 Brutal reign of Congo Free State by Leopold II. An estimated 10 - 15 million Congolese perished under Leopold's regime of rubber and ivory extraction.
- 1960 Congo gains independence from Belgium and democratically elects its first Prime Minister, Patrice Emery Lumumba.
- 1961 On January 17, 1961, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated by Western Powers and Congolese elite. Belgium apologized in 2002 for their role in the assassination of Lumumba.
- 1965 to 1997 The United States installed and maintained Joseph Desire Mobutu in power for over thirty years in spite of a number of attempts by the Congolese people to overthrow him.
- 1996 United States and British allies, Rwanda and Uganda led the invasion of the Congo.
- 1997 Mobutu is overthrown in May and Laurent Kabila is installed in power by Rwanda and Uganda.
- 1998 US and British allies Rwanda and Uganda invaded Congo a second time in an attempt to remove Laurent Kabila from power. The second invasion unleashed the deaths of an estimated six million Congolese.
- 2001 Laurent Desire Kabila was assassinated and replaced by his son Joseph Kabila.
- 2002 The war officially ends but the conflict continues to this day, mainly in the east of the country.
- 2006 Joseph Kabila was elected president.
- 2010 The United Nations publish the UN Mapping Exercise Report which documents the atrocities, crimes against humanity, war crimes committed in the Congo from 1993 - 2003
- 2011 Joseph Kabila claims victory in fraudulent elections and lacks legitimacy.
- 2012 The Uganda and Rwanda-backed militia M23 displaces nearly 1 million inhabitants and briefly captures the city of Goma.
- 2013 The UN spearheads a peace deal signed by 11 African countries and four regional and international organizations.