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## **DRC braces for its most contested general elections**

### ***ДРК готується до найспірніших загальних виборів***

*Демократична республіка Конго готується обирати нового президента. Діючому президенту Феліксу Чісекеді належить конкурувати з 22 іншими кандидатами в президенти, і ця дуже велика кількість загрожує розділити їхні голоси і віддати перевагу Ф. Чісекеді. Усього за два тижні до виборів 22 кандидати сіли та розглянули можливість консолідації навколо єдиної та грізної загрози Ф. Чісекеді. Цьогорічні вибори вже були затьмарені відходом групи європейських спостерігачів після того, як уряд ДРК зажадав доступу до їх виборчих пристроїв. Незалежна національна виборча комісія (CENI) спробувала переконати всіх і кожного, що всі системи функціонують. За даними Міжнародної місії зі спостереження за виборами Центру Картера, є кілька тривожних сигналів.*

<https://www.news24.com/citypress/politics/drc-braces-for-its-most-contested-general-elections-20231213>

The bustling streets of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are alive with election fervour as everywhere candidates and their lobbyists are on scooters hoisting their candidates' and the country's flags as they rally for support in an election that happens a week from now on December 20.

But in the capital city Kinshasa, you could be mistaken that the country is a one party state as the picture of the incumbent President Felix Tshisekedi adorns 90% of the election posters.

Would be representatives at provincial and local candidates hoist their own posters with their faces alongside that of Tshisekedi to boost their own election prospects.

It is as if Tshisekedi's own win in these elections is a foregone conclusion, so everyone piggybacks on that victory. But only five years ago, his first election win was shrouded in controversy as former oil executive Martin Fayulu was believed to have won the elections by non-governmental organisations and some elections observers. However, somehow Tshisekedi pulled through and was announced the winner.

But as the entrenched incumbent, the elections are now his to lose. He is facing a contest from 22 other presidential candidates and that very high number threatens to split their vote and favour Tshisekedi. Only two weeks before the elections, did the 22 candidates sit down and consider consolidating around a united and formidable threat to Tshisekedi.

That candidate they are coalescing around is Moise Katumbi Tshombe, the former governor of the Katanga province and owner of the popular football team TP Mazebe, who was a one thorn in the arm of former president Joseph Kabila.

Tshombe fell out with Tshisekedi after his election and is now pushing ahead with his own presidential ambition. Other notable candidates include Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr Dennis Mukwege and Fayulu.

The question is whether the field is equally level for all the participants. With an incredible 45 000 candidates all eyeing for a seat in either the national, provincial or local government, it is a huge task for those running the elections. Observer missions are keeping an eagle eye on the polls because of such concerns. They are here soon. Be careful. You know well the war raging in the east of our country. But I am determined to fight to overcome insecurity in the east of our country.”

However, this year elections have already been marred by the departure of an European observer team after the DRC government demanded access to their election devices.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) has tried to assure all and sundry that all the systems are in place. This is a country desperate for peace after years of civil war, especially in the Eastern parts where a number of militias continue to operate. The most prominent of these groups is the M23 rebels, who have resurfaced in recent years to claim territory in the area. Many in the Congolese government blame Rwanda for supporting the M23, but the Rwandans denies this.

Besides the persistent war that has ravaged and displaced many in those areas, the DRC is still deeply in need of development with large swathes of poor people and high unemployment.

The DRC is rich in natural resources that have not translated to a better standard of living for the population. On Tuesday, while campaigning in his hometown of Mbuji-Mayi, Tshisekedi told the assembled thousands: “It is time for the population to open their eyes. Our country is heavily fought. Every Congolese must stand up to defend the homeland. The enemies of our country are found among the presidential candidates. They are here soon. Be careful. You know well the war raging in the east of our country. But I am determined to fight to overcome insecurity in the east of our country.”

We must integrate the army and the police in order to ensure and protect the territorial integrity of our country. During my second term we will improve the conditions of our soldiers and police, because we must be strong to face our enemies. I am committed to continuing our programme for 145 territories as well as free secondary school.

But before that Tshisekedi must help ensure the integrity of the elections. According to the Carter Center International Election Observation Mission, nonprofit organisation founded in 1982 by former US president Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn to advance peace and health worldwide which has been active in the DRC since 2006, there are a few red flags that need to be attended to.

Their roadmap flagged potential constraints that could hamper the election process, such as the availability of financial means, the slow process of operations to identify the population and voters, the weak operational capacity of the CENI, and insecurity in the country.

According to this observer mission, the CENI completed voter registration largely on schedule, keeping the elections on track to be held within the constitutional deadline.

However, the quality of the voter register has been questioned by numerous interlocutors, who have cited concerns about the quality and transparency of the process.

Concerns about the voter list have contributed to mistrust among the stakeholders around the electoral process.

About 5 million voters were not registered compared with the CENI's original target. Insecurity affected the implementation of the process in some areas, especially in the eastern part of the country, where about 1.7 million voters could not be registered.