

Canada - Africa
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
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**Report of the
Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association
to the
Election Observation Mission
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
July 28 to August 1, 2006**

Report of the delegation of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association that visited the Democratic Republic of Congo from July 28 to August 1, 2006 on the occasion of the first presidential ballot and the legislative election in the Democratic Republic of Congo(DRC)

Report

The Association was represented by the Honourable Mauril Bélanger, P.C., M.P. and Co-Chair of the Association; the Honourable Terry Stratton, Senator; and Ms. Carole Lavallée, M.P.

Objective

The Association organized an observation mission relating to the first presidential ballot and the legislative election in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in co-operation with the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF).

The purpose of the Association's Mission was the same as the OIF's, which was to observe the Congolese election process in general and the ballot on July 30, 2006, in particular.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been plagued with crises and instability for over 10 years. The election of July 30, 2006 was the first in 40 years. Observers considered this election to be vital in achieving peace, stability and reconciliation in DRC and in the region as a whole.

The electoral situation in DRC, however, was complex. There were 33 candidates on the presidential ballot, 5,000 candidates vying for 500 seats in the National Assembly, an overabundance of parties (197 parties took part in the election), highly diverse alliances (15 alliances had been formed in the months preceding the election), and 26 million Congolese voters at 50,000 central polling places.

The themes of the election involved governance, peace and security, the reduction of poverty, economic development, investment, infrastructure development, employment and education.

During the election, there were about 19,000 UN peacekeepers (under the mandate of MONUC – the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo). The MONUC force was supported by a 2,000-strong European Union (EU) force, the National Congolese Army and the Congolese Police Force. The security situation was complex and changeable.

Canada supports the UN Operations Centre in Kinshasa. CIDA spent \$12 million over the past year to prepare for the election. CIDA actively supports governance programs in DRC (battle against corruption). CIDA's financial assistance budget for DRC in 2005-2006 was \$29 million (CIDA has spent \$180 million in DRC since 1998).

OIF

Here are some excerpts from OIF press releases issued on August 2, summarizing comments made by the Mission, in which members of the Association took part:

[Translation]

The Francophonie Mission regrets that the last part of the election campaign was fraught with violence, resulting in death and serious incidents, such as looting and setting fire to the Haute Autorité des Médias (HAM) and the Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH), which could have had serious consequences for the electoral process.

However, it is very pleased that voting operations went smoothly, overall, and salutes the civic-mindedness of the voters, the dedication of the election agents, the maturity of party and candidate monitors and the discretion of security forces, all of which contributed to the free nature of this historic election.

The Mission would also like to salute the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) for its effort in having brought such a complex process to this stage.

Apart from the difficulties, most of which were due to the election agents' lack of experience and to physical limitations, which did not taint the lawfulness and sincerity of the election, the Francophonie Mission noted that the election process was free and transparent.

The Francophonie Mission was struck by the strong mobilization of Congolese voters. It saw in their commitment and enthusiasm the Congolese people's determination to make a clean break with the past and resolutely build a future in which there is peace, democracy and respect for human rights.

Canadian delegates

After being trained on the electoral process in Kinshasa, delegates travelled on a MONUC (UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) flight to the city of Lubumbashi, in the southern part of the country. On site, on election day, the delegates visited many polling stations.

A copy of the Report prepared by delegates for the OIF is in the appendix. This report contains detailed observations of the Canadian delegates.

Other information

Canadian Ambassador in DRC, Jean-Pierre Bolduc, hosted a reception attended by the delegation and many Canadians who have participated in observation missions in DRC.

Conclusion

Overall, the Mission was a success in that it made it possible to observe work that has been accomplished in the field by various international organizations to ensure an acceptable election process in this country, which has experienced difficult times in the past few decades, and to help strengthen the use of democratic and parliamentary processes. The delegation would like to thank the OIF for its support during the delegation's visit, and the Canadian Embassy in DRC, for its warm welcome.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Mauril Bélanger, P.C., M.P.
Co-Chair
Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association

Election observers report

General election – July 30, 2006 Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The observers who have signed this report had the opportunity to visit eight polling stations each in Lubumbashi, for a total of 24. A list of the stations is appended. The observers were present for the opening and closing, and the counting of votes, at one of the stations. In each location, they watched the voting process for about 30 minutes.

General observations

Overall, we found that voting was carried out in an orderly and transparent manner. The citizens we met in the voting centres assured us that they were able to act freely.

The members of the election staff, the national observers and the scrutineers acting for the political parties corroborated this.

We did not see any propaganda, any deliberate act of intimidation or any obvious attempts at influence, either inside or around the voting centres during our visits.

Nor did we see partisan promotional material around the voting centres or in the polling stations.

Difficulties

Were there any difficulties or shortcomings? Yes, of course. A number of mistakes were made, in a number of ways. Nothing was perfect. But these problems appeared to us to have more to do with inexperience:

- a small number of polling stations did not post voters lists;
- scrutineers were giving their opinions and suggesting to the returning officers what they should do;
- scrutineers were helping voters to vote and even to insert their ballots in the ballot box when asked to do so;
- scrutineers collaborated on the count and handled ballots, but they did it in all good faith, to give a helping hand to an overwhelmed team;
- some assessors did not check for inked fingers, but we did not see any voters come in with fingers that were already inked.

It did not appear to us that anyone could have taken advantage of these errors to influence or change the outcome of the vote. We think that scrutineers should be trained by the same organization that trained the election staff as a whole; the latter were well-trained and despite their inexperience were able to carry out their task successfully in difficult circumstances.

A special case

In one polling station, space was so tight that voters, returning officer, first and second scrutineers, clerk, polling booths and ballot boxes were all within a couple of steps of one another.

The returning officer asked a scrutineer to explain to voters how to go about marking their ballots. Two scrutineers were standing just beside the booths and could see how people voted; there was no other place they could have stood. The clerk had to turn his head so as not to see how people were voting. In this case it was difficult to keep the ballot secret.

Logistics

Here are some technical points that should be given more attention at the next vote:

- The dye in the ink did not seem to be strong enough. It took considerable time to distinguish between a finger that had been inked and one that had not.
- It was hard to keep the ballots secret because of their sheer size (larger than the polling booths). People had a tendency to come out of the booths to turn the pages.
- Voters also tended to leave the booths to mark their ballots because the lighting in the rooms was not adequate and was still worse in the booths (one polling station solved the problem by putting the booth right in front of a window!).
- It was difficult to explain to voters where to make the folds so that they could put their ballot into the box.
- The lantern provided was not adequate for counting votes; more light is needed.
- The rule that requires finding five voters one hour before the closing of the polls is too difficult to comply with: how can a person be found to participate in the vote count, which can last until late in the evening, and indeed well into the night, without having planned a meal and being able to inform his or her family?

Reception of international observers

The people in charge of the voting welcomed the international observers very positively, even warmly. They were familiar with the observers' mandate and treated them with great courtesy while enabling them to do their work in the best conditions possible under the circumstances.

What could not be observed ...

Naturally we can only testify to what we saw. We stayed in one polling station until the ballots were counted for the presidential election, but we cannot testify to anything that happened after that.

What happened when votes for members of Parliament were counted? Were the results compiled properly? Were the ballots put in a sealed envelope? Were they delivered as agreed? What happened to unused ballots? In short, is it possible that there was abusive manipulation of the vote? The undersigned cannot testify to all the later stages in the polling process or to more than a portion of the vote count. However, we venture to hope that the organizations involved in observing the election process were able to follow the process in question and can pass informed judgement on the overall process.

Conclusions

Despite the difficulties, the shortcomings observed, and the need to improve certain technical aspects, the undersigned remain of the opinion that where we had an opportunity to observe the process, the voting was free, democratic and transparent.

Mauril Bélanger, MP

Carole Lavallée, MP

Terry Stratton, Senator

Signed this day at Ottawa, August 8, 2006

Appendix 1

List of voting centres visited

Province: Katanga

Commune	Voting centre	Polls
Kempemba	7420 (for the opening)	B, C, E
Kempemba	7423	A, D, E
Kempemba	7382	A, B, C
Kempemba	7388	A, C, D
Kempemba	7380	C, D, F
Kempemba	7387	B, C, D
Lubumbashi	7504	A, C, F
Annexe	7358	A, C, D
Kempemba	7388 (for the closing and count)	A, C

N.B. Because the last two polls had already been visited earlier in the day, they are not included in the total of polling stations visited.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association	
ACTIVITY	Election Observation Mission	
DESTINATION	Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo	
DATES	July 28 to August 1, 2006	
SENATORS	Hon. Terry Stratton, Senator	
MEMBERS	Hon. Mauril Bélanger, PC, MP Ms. Carole Lavallée, MP	
STAFF		
TRANSPORTATION	AIR	\$23,071.14
	GROUND	\$ 150.00
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 2,071.71	
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0	
PER DIEMS	\$ 2,680.29	
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0	
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 60.00
TOTAL	\$ 28,033.14	