

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION
CHARTING A PATH FORWARD FOR THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning. I think I will begin. But I've got a little bit of an introduction as we play for time here, and try to buy ourselves a few minutes for our final panelist, Omékongo Dibinga, to arrive.

So, my name is Mike O'Hanlon, I'm with the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. I would like to welcome all of you to this Brookings event on the future of DRC, including its political and security challenges, and its ongoing humanitarian challenges as well.

We have a remarkable panel today. And let me say a couple of words about each of them including Tom Perriello, E.J. Hogendoorn, and Omékongo as he makes his way over through rush hour traffic on this first day of spring. And thank you all, for making it through the threatening weather to be here with us.

Tom Perriello is a remarkable individual who was President Obama's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa, during the last couple of years of the Obama administration he had a Congressman from rural Virginia, before that he had also worked Sierra Leone on war crimes issues. He ran for the Democratic nomination for the Governor of Virginia last year on a message that really, I think, resonated in a lot of the State, and helped reveal some of the important ways in which the national political debate this year and beyond will and should occur. I'm really pleased to have here. Tom has remained very active on DRC issues, and has just come back from a number of meetings in Europe consulting with a wide array of actors on this set of issues.

E.J. Hogendoorn is at the International Crisis Group where he's the Deputy Program Director for Africa, longstanding scholar there, with a number of previous affiliations and associations on issues of Africa. He's either my former student, or I'm his former student, I can't remember anymore. We've known each other so long. But today, I'm much more his student, as I am Tom's, because they are the ones following issues of DRC, and Africa in general, so closely. And therefore, we will turn to them very soon for their opening thoughts.

We are going to have about half the discussion up here, we've got a kind willingness by the Ambassador from the DRC to start off the discussion period after that, and then we'll go to you for your questions and thoughts in the second half of the event.

Let me just say a couple more things by way of warming up the subject, and I'm not going to claim any expertise, I've not been to DRC since 1984, I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kikwit, in the Southwestern vicinity of the country, but that was 34 years ago. And certainly followed DRC with great affection and interest ever since.

We know it's been through a lot, while we know this is a crucial year yet again, DRC continues to be a place with more than 15,000 U.N. peacekeepers, crises and conflicts especially in the East and the Southeast and other parts of the country as well. Some 5 million or so displaced persons in various parts of the country from the ongoing conflicts.

Ongoing effects from the Rwanda genocide that still afflicts part of

the east and create fissures and tensions there, a whole host of problems. And of course now we have a crucial ongoing period in the presidential transition, where Joseph Kabila who has now reached the end, and exceeded the end of his second elected term, and therefore is not allowed, by DRC's Constitution, to run for the upcoming term is, nonetheless, in a period where it's not clear when or how elections will happen.

There are concerns about proper preparation for these elections, concerns about stability, concerns about whether President Kabila really intends to step down. We are watching a lot of leaders around the world move towards a prolongation of their "democratic" terms, and I say democratic ion quotes, and I'm not here directly speaking about Mr. Kabila, I'm speaking about Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, President Erdoğan of Turkey.

There are a lot of examples, and not to mention right across the border in Rwanda and Burundi, where Presidents have found a way to either modify a Constitution, or suspend a Constitution, or ignore a Constitution, and ultimately stay in office longer.

There may be situations where, as we Americans who FDR as President for more than three terms, we could understand where that might be, momentarily, reasonable, given a nation's crisis. Nonetheless, in general, it seems to fly in the face of the democratic norms that we all hope to see spread and deepen around the world.

And so, I, speaking for myself, am very hopeful that we will, indeed see a successful transition, an election that is fair, that is well-prepared,

that is not violent, and that produces a legitimately-elected new leader for DRC in an election that's now already overdue.

I'm going to finish this belabored introduction, where, as you can see, I'm playing for time, but I'm going to just read from a transcript that was from a Brookings event on the DRC about a-year-and-a-half ago. As we were gearing up for elections which were already close to overdue at that point, and we had the kind intervention and presence of the DRC Ambassador, and he gave us some pretty inspirational words. And I'm just going to remind you of what he said, because I think it sets the framework for the discussion today.

And he was speaking in French, we had a translator, but he said it very eloquently, and the transcript I'm going to you from is in English, and here is what he said, "I would like to say that President Kabila has organized the first elections in this country. So, give him some credit. And he also organized the second elections in 2009, the second elections. He could have changed Constitution in those years if he had wanted to, like a lot of other presidents in Africa had done;" and of course this now my parentheses, (a lot of other presidents around the world).

"There were important people in his government that asked in 2009 to change to Constitution, but he said, no. Rwanda has changed the Constitution. Our direct neighbor has done this process and they have changed the Constitution. Like a lot of times this has happened, we could have done it as well. But our President has said, no, I want to have a democratic culture in this country. So what I'm asking for is to have these elections now, we need time to

pass calmly, and he will not seek or gain a third term."

And those were the words; very clearly setting down a guideline for the democratic transition process in DRC that we now hope is really entering into a phase. So, as Moderator, I've given a little point of view here. I'm going to pull myself out of the conversation, and just sort of help the trains run on time, now that we successfully let the traffic around DuPont Circle diminish.

And I want to welcome Omékongo Dibinga, a Congolese Activist, Artist, Trilingual Poet, Motivational Speaker, and remarkable person on all things Africa, and certainly all things Congo.

So, what I'd like to do, sir, now that we are all good, and I've introduced the subject and introduced everybody, if you are okay, begin with you. And I know that you would like to give us some words to sort of help us just understand where your country is at this juncture, and its history, where Africa is at this juncture, how we Americans should be thinking about what we can do to help. So, without further ado, Omékongo, the floor is yours.

MR. DIBINGA: Good morning.

GROUP: Good morning.

MR. DIBINGA: I'm glad I could make it. I'm very happy to be here. I've spoken at a school, and the students had lots of question afterwards, so I was able to make through the traffic and everything, and one of my students is here. What's up?

Look! There's an Aboriginal saying that says: if you are coming because you want to help us, stay home, but if you are coming because you

believe our destiny is intertwined, then by all means let's work together.

The Congo is in a situation right now where we need to have an all-hands on deck approach towards effecting change, and we cannot do it in a paternalistic way. Fighting for change in the Congo has been part of my family business. I inherited the struggle from my parents, who inherited it from their parents.

And at the end of the day we can all of the well-intentioned people that we want from the Western world, and everything, but making change in Congo without working with actual Congolese people who are on the ground making change, creates bigger problems than we hope to fix.

So, right now, when we look at situations going on with elections, and we look at situations going on with corruption, we need to make sure that right now, Congo is ripe for change. Congo is ripe for real situations, real solutions, because we have real positivity movements on the ground; you know, LUCHA organizations that are fighting for change.

And what we need to do in every single instance, from our area here, is we need to work with enhancing the groups on the ground. We can do policy papers all day, we can make statements all day, we can put stuff on the website, but what are we doing to actually engage people on the ground?

My father in Congo right now, and is ailing -- and is having challenges. I've gone to Congo and do work in refugee camps, and worked with displaced populations, I've buried family members who have died because of these conflicts, that we can talk about them starting in the mid-1990s, but we've

been dealing with challenges in the Congo since the Berlin Conference; right?

So, let's just be realistic about where we are.

So, the situation right now, is that the Congolese people, we are being challenged, we are struggling, there's a lot of concern, but Congolese people are always optimistic. The Congolese people never stop working for change, and here, in this country what we can do is work to paint a better picture, of what's going on, help create a better narrative, because one of the things we understand as it relates to the Western media, they can only handle one African conflict per decade.

So, we know like in the '80s it was Ethiopia, in the '90s it was Rwanda, the last decade it was Sudan. And I'm like, all the countries are fighting, can I get that spot on CNN. Like, everyone is fighting, but with the work that we do, and all the influence in this room, we can work to present a better picture that will make us want to get more engaged in Congo, not from a savior type of mentality, but from a partnership mentality. And that's where we are today.

MR. O'HANLON: That's fantastic. I wondered if you could, many people here know you, others are learning about you, and I think are probably intrigued by what you just said. Could you just give us a little bit more background on, maybe what part of Congo your family is from, and also some of the things you are hoping to leave aside who you are going to vote for, root for, or run yourself? Some of the themes --

MR. DIBINGA: I'll think about that.

MR. O'HANLON: Some of the themes that you hope that a political debate in Congo right now can really help bring forth and get people to focus on.

MR. DIBINGA: Yes. No doubt. My name as you said, is Dr. Omékongo (inaudible) Dibinga, (Speaking in foreign language). I don't think all of that was in the bio. My father is from Kivu, and my mother is from Kasai. And as you can tell from my name I was also born in a faraway place called Boston, Massachusetts, and so, like I said, every single day, my parents were staunch activist working through a change before they got really involved in a political movement.

They are professors in Congo as well, teaching people like Patrice Lumumba, and maybe other folks. So when I say that this has been part of my life, it's been something that has never ceased for me, and I just want to help people create situations where they can just be, and that's my background.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Okay. Let's move along. We are going to have a lot of conversations, including the panelists asking each other questions, and discussing things. So let me continue to ask them to frame some of the big issues for us, and E.J. is going to next, talking about whatever is on his mind, and how ICG has been working on the DRC issue for a long time. I think they are working on a current report, they are focused very much, very intently on the election, and the electoral process. So E.J., over to you?

MR. HOGENDOORN: Well, thanks, Mike. And I'm humbled to be on this panel. I'm not a Congo expert; at least I don't follow it day-to-day, but I do

certainly work with a couple of colleagues who follow events very, very closely, and I am actually averse, I guess I am the (inaudible) policy wonk here in the room, and I apologize for that.

But I think it's my job to give a bit of context for people here, and to think about how well -- how does the USG, or other international actors try to influence events, because we are partners but at the same time we are also influencers and we can do that for good or for bad, and unfortunately oftentimes it has been bad.

I mean, the first thing, just to, kind of, reemphasize what we've been saying. Congo is in crisis, right? There's 5 million people who are displaced in the country or are refugees outside in the region. There's 7.7 million people who are estimated to be severely food insecure in the country, in conflict, and internal violence is intensifying and spreading, in part because of the elections that are approaching.

And worse than that, humanitarian access to these vulnerable populations is difficult, in part because of direct attacks on humanitarians, and also just because of the generalized insecurity makes it very dangerous for these people to operate in areas where people are in need.

And it's not just a problem or the DRC it's a problem for the region, a lot of these tensions are starting to spillover into regional states, this is one reason why you are seeing a number of regional leaders take a keen interest in what's happening in the country, and we should be aware that Congo is too big to fail, not just because it's Congo, but also because it can influence events in the

Greater Central African region as well.

And just as a point of departure, it's our argument at Crisis Group that the only sustainable solutions to the conflicts in DRC are a gradual return to inclusive and accountable government. And while we in the West oftentimes focus on vertical accountability, i.e. just as perpetrators of atrocities and war crimes, I think it's also important for us to think about horizontal accountability, electoral accountability, the ability for Congolese people to be able to vote some of the people that they are happy with out of office, and for the Congolese people to build the institutions that are able to keep the presidency, or the parliament, or governors, whoever be it, in high political office in check because that's their role in an institutionalized government.

Now, I think for us we believe, and one reason why I'm here is we are actually at an important decision point for the international community. It's our view that the electoral train is now on the rails, to paraphrase Kabila. That means that likely we will have elections in 2018, and that presents a dilemma for the international community.

What does the international community do? Do you support elections that may, in fact, be incredible -- or on credible elections, I should say? Or, do you use the elections as a point of leverage which then allows the regime to continue to delay the elections because the international community isn't supporting them.

That creates a number of challenges for international actors. At the moment what we do know is that CENI, the Electoral Commission for the

DRC, has published a calendar and according to that calendar elections will be held in December of 2018. The biggest opposition, or non-political opposition in the country, the Catholic Church, is now urging all people to prepare for elections.

Also, it seems that while the opposition is divided, most opposition parties are preparing for elections as well. So, we have a situation where a lot of people are willingly, or not, preparing for a vote. And there's been some measured progress. We do have a voter register with 46 million people registered, which is 5 million more than people had estimated it would be able to register, so that's an important step.

Now, the voter registration system needs to be cleaned up, and it needs to be audited, but if that happens we've made a very important step in electoral preparations. There's also a new electoral law, which though also somewhat contentious, improves a lot on what the situation was in past elections.

For now, it looks like the law will, to some degree, reduce the number of candidates on the ballot, which believe it or not, is important in the context of Congolese politics, because in 2011 the ballot was 55 pages long. Okay? In another attempt, which is somewhat problematic but understandable, the law also has increased the non-reimbursable fee for candidacy register.

So that, obviously, disenfranchises some people, but what it does is, again it reduces the number of candidates and simplifies the elections. It also increased the threshold for political parties to be able to obtain seats both in provincial and the national legislature, which is again an important development

because that reduces the number of parties in these assemblies, and it reduces the incentive for individual politicians, particularly ones in smaller parties to trade their votes and their positions in parties for favors and other things. And so I think these are all important developments that should be sustained if possible.

There is one question though which we think needs to be addressed, which is the question of transparency of the budget, of the elections that CENI has published. Right now the government says it's going to pay for the entire \$432 million cost of elections by itself.

Although we don't where the money is coming from, because we don't know where the money is coming from, and what budget exactly will be covering, we don't know where the gaps will be, and I think it's important for the government to be honest and transparent about that, to show where it may need help from the international community in running a credible election.

There's also been a number of interesting conference building measures that have been initiated. There is a voter education campaign in process which is quite good, there's been some limited reform of the Electoral Commission, not as much as some people would have hoped, but at least there has been some. But, we need to note that important demands or agreements within the December 2016 Saint Sylvester Agreement between the Opposition and the Government haven't been implemented; the most important of them being the release of at least 90 political prisoners who are still being detained. And the issue that one of the main candidates for the presidential vote in the next election was Katumbi, is still currently in exile.

The other reality and a challenge I think, is to recognize that the majority coalition, and Kabila's Party, are in a very, very strong position, vis-à-vis the opposition. They have a very strong electoral machine that will probably be able to run a very good campaign -- well, relatively good campaign at the national provincial and local levels. And, the problem is that, in our view at least, the opposition hasn't paid enough attention to the importance of being able to mobilize the grassroots in an effort to push their agendas and their candidacy.

The biggest question really on the table though, and I'm sure we will discuss this at great length at this panel, is the question of what's going to happen with Kabila, particularly since, as Mike mentioned, he is not allowed to run for another term per the current constitutional provisions.

There are three scenarios, the three options that people discuss that I should just put on the table, one obviously is that Kabila may try to change the Constitution again, that has been very unpopular, but obviously he could try to do that.

The other is to run what many people have called the Putin-Medvedev option, which is that Kabila finds someone who will replace him, but he is at the same time, still the person behind the scenes who is in charge. That of course from our view is a pretty risky option, because how can he trust this person to guard his interest after he has left power. And so that's a risky move, and I think that that's part of the calculations that Kabila must be considering.

And the other option of course is, if things don't go as well he could go back to a policy *lissage* of continuing to delay the elections, and to

make the argument that the country is not ready for this, but the real risk is that the insecurity and violence will continue to spread to a point where it will no longer be controllable by the government or by regional actors outside the country.

I will try to kind of wrap my other points pretty quickly in the interest of time. I just want to note that right now the opposition is still in disarray, it is still suffering from years and years of government repression, and divide and rule tactics, and it really, really is time if not now, if not, you know, six months ago for the opposition to organize and to be in a position that it present a credible alternative to the majority.

And not because we necessarily support the opposition, but because we think that competition is healthy for the country, is healthy to have populations in Congo have a choice as to who represents them.

And I should say that, last but not least, what is really interesting, at least from the Crisis Group perspective is that while, of course, this is an issue of great interest in the U.S., it's not just an issue that is exciting the West, it's also becoming a more pressing issue for the region as well.

And so what you are seeing, and what is, to some degree, very interesting and a new development is that the AU, some of the regional organizations, particularly the South African Development Community, of which the Congo is one, the Organization of Francophone, and the EU are all taking a much, much greater interest in what's happening in the country and the elections.

And so, right now it's an important point for everyone to come

together to develop a shared platform as to what they would like to see happen in DRC, and that it hopefully is a departure point to move the country in the right direction. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, E.J. As I invite Tom to speak now, I'd like to just mention two things and very quickly in transition. One, the term *glissement*, most of you know it, this means in the context of DRC politics, but it means slipping, elections slipping further and further and further into the future, which we've now seen for a couple of years, but hopefully, it's not going to continue, but just to clarify that one little term in the nomenclature from Congo watchers.

And the other is that, and I'm guessing E.J. would agree with me on this, but he used the phrase of hoping the Congo returns to inclusive politics. Of course, Congo really has never had inclusive politics, at least not in any time that I can remember, unless you want to go back to the pre-Leopold II, pre-Belgian Colonialism period, in which I guess you could argue there was a certain degree of perhaps the best local representation the Congo has had.

After that time we had a sorry history of Belgian Colonialism which was not well done, I think it's fair to say. At least I'm putting my view on the table and just get that out there, and then the United States having some role in unsavory transitions, Lumumba was already mentioned; Mobutu came to power, I was a Pease Corps volunteer halfway through the Mobutu decline of the country, which he left the country in debt and in chaos, and with no political legacy to build upon.

Then of course we had 10 years of horrible war, and you probably could have mentioned, because obviously you know better than I on the Congo that, in fact, after the Rwanda Genocide, in a way the next decade was the period when we focused on Congo's War in the East. It was sort of a slow motion, but very lethal, and very ongoing conflict which continues today, and maybe a little bit less intense, but still very severe. And Tom worked hard on addressing some of the causes and the symptoms during his tenure as Special Envoy.

So, I guess to conclude what I'm saying, is this is both a frightening moment, but also a hopeful moment, because some of the dynamics that E.J. talked about had never been seen before in the Congo, and there is something at least formative to build upon if things can go in a positive direction.

So, Tom, thanks for letting me put on the table; and now, over to you.

MR. PERRIELLO: Thank you so much for the introduction. Thanks, everyone, for your interest in the DRC. It's wonderful to see my friends from the DRC Government, particularly His Excellency, Mr. Kikaya, who, sometimes we've agreed, sometimes we've disagreed, but he's a brilliant man, and someone who certainly is a serious force in trying to shape how this feature goes here, at a moment, that's really an inflection point for the people of Congo, with an understanding that the stakes are very high.

We could see, in a best-case scenario, a peaceful democratic transition that would be historic in its nature. We know country after country on

every continent that makes the first peaceful democratic transition of power is five times more likely to have sustained peace, than countries that fail to make that transition.

So, in a best-case scenario, President Kabila's legacy will be not just his time in office, but having overseen that peaceful transition. In a worst-case scenario we could see the break down including a great deal of violence. We already see 5,000 dead in the Kaisai, we've seen hundreds killed or disappeared in the Ituri Region just in the last couple of months, and as many as 50,000 to 100,000 displaced, the research still being done to figure out those figures.

That could be the beginning of a lot of instability that comes from various forces, and I would argue that that includes uncertainty, not only the failure to complete the elections on time, now on a second time, both not on the constitutional deadline, nor on the New Year's Eve Accord deadline, greatly increases the chance of instability and armed civil strife, that uncertainty in that extension.

So, this is a moment where we can see two very different futures, and although you mentioned that we have seen a trend towards leaders staying in power, it's important to note we are also seeing a countervailing trend. We've seen in South Africa a recent transition of power that I think is one that has an enormous amount of popular support.

We've seen the end of President Mugabe's rule. We've seen a transition in Angola take place. Many of the countries that are the most

economically successful do continue to allow those transfers to take place.

I want to echo something Omékongo said, and this is something I've reiterated from the first day on this Special Envoy job and beyond, and something that I believe is important for the government to hear, and for the opposition and civil society to hear, that may sound strange coming from me.

The international community matters a lot less than people think, in the DRC. Change is always going to be driven from inside the Congo, and then the next most relevant group are going to be the neighbors, and that's because of the intensity of how much people care about it. For the people in Congo, there's not a day you don't think about the Congo because you are living there.

If you are a neighboring country, at the point you start seeing refugee flows, at the point where you are seeing the economy of the region dragged down by the uncertainty and lack of investments, these are things that you are going to care about at a much higher degree than European countries, or Western countries, or even China.

So the change right now, in terms of understanding it very much as an outsider and an observer, as I am, it is most important to understand where people are, and this I think is a truth that cannot be changed. We can get into very important conversations about: was the New Year's Eve Deal negotiated the right way, the technicalities of the election, but overwhelmingly, let's be clear, if the vast majority of the Congolese people wanted President Kabila to stay, he would be staying.

If they wanted a change in the Constitution for him to extend his lead, his time in office, that would happen. If they didn't care about this election there would be no rumblings and push for this. The push for change and the push for alternance is first and foremost coming, overwhelmingly, from the Congolese people. There is a great deal of pride in the Constitution, there is a great deal of desire not to go backwards.

President Kabila has never gotten above the teens in recent polling in terms of approval or support. Most of those have them in the single digits around 7, 8 or 9 percent support among the Congolese people, he has gotten as high as 16 percent in one poll. This is after eight years, really ten, twelve years, depending how you count it, of leadership.

When people are appearing in the streets, month after month in nonviolent protest, this is not something that is coming from the outside. I think the government can have the tendency to believe that everything that happens in the Congo is because the U.S. has somehow funded it, and we all know there's a history to that.

But the fact is, the U.S. just doesn't care enough. I kind of wish we did, but these are grassroots support, so sometimes there's too much focus on the international community's role from the government, because they don't want to face their unpopularity with their people. Similarly, there can be among the opposition party too much focus on the international community that we can snap our fingers and make President Kabila disappear, and not actually have to go and organize your party, and build your grassroots support base.

So, again, I acknowledge very much the history of why there is often a belief that there's some grand scheme from the international community that's driving everything. Now, I do believe the international community has tried to learn from past mistakes to be, as you said, and ally and a partner to the people.

And I think it's very important to understand, and I don't speak for this administration, I want to be clear about that, but I'm certainly in touch with them, and in touch with other governments that care about the DRC.

All anybody wants is a level playing field for the Congolese people to choose their next leader. We don't care who that leader is. We may have opinions about some of the individuals, but this, all we are going to talk about today in terms of deadlines and technicalities, all of that is essentially irrelevant, relative to the question of whether or not the Congolese people are going to get to have a real election.

And ultimately, one of the most important things to have for an election, is you have to have candidates. We all know that from elections here and everywhere else. There's not a real campaign until you know who is running. And that means the President is going to have to announce at some point who the PPRD candidate is. We will know this is serious when we start to see that.

If Moïse Katumbi is not allowed back in the country, we know that the Congolese people are not getting to choose. If Vital and a hundred other people decide whether they are going to run as their own candidates, or if they

are going to be in a coalition, that's how democracy works, and then people make those choices. It is the appearance of candidates, and the ability to organize.

I've been a politician as well as a Democrat -- as a diplomat, I've also been a Democrat, (laughter) I continue to be a Democrat now more than ever, but anyway that's another conversation. But I can tell you that there's no way I can run for office, if I'm not allowed to have a meeting, if I'm not allowed to have a rally, if I can't have decent access to the media and the other side can control the media.

So, when all is said and done, I think the Congolese people know their country better than anyone else, and they can know democracy when they see it. And right now I do not think people feel like the pieces have been put in place, that make it feel like a real campaign is about to happen. And I think the amount of tension that will be released when people feel like that is going forward will be incredibly important, and people will understand it when it's there.

So that free space to campaign, the things we end up fighting about, and again, I'm very much on the sidelines of this now, but someone who cares deeply about the people of Congo, and the country of Congo, and the region, is the calendar, the registrations, the confidence-building measures, are all basically, whether or not people really believe it. Are we off the races as this happens, and going in that direction? Who the Congolese people choose is another thing.

I will push back a little bit. I do think actually opposition with -- we

talk about political opposition and we talk about civil society, I actually do think there has been a tremendous amount of both organization and courage. I think less from the political parties, and more from civil society. But there are people that are risking their lives. There have been security forces that have shot into churches, there are people who've been detained, yes they've been released.

So, I actually think that when I took the job three years ago, whenever it was, the most that I most-often heard was, change is never going to happen because ultimately the Congolese, civil society will be disorganized, no one wants to care enough and go to the streets.

I think that voice is something that deserves a lot of recognition; I think the Catholic Church and bishops have felt like their definition of neutrality is to protect people's basic rights. If people's basic rights involve going to the streets to demand that President Kabila leave, that doesn't mean the church is taking that position, it means they are protecting the human dignity of their parishioners, and those of other faiths to move forward in that way.

So, I think I'll just end, very quickly, on a hopeful note, which is that I do think we need to keep the eye on the prize, this could be a great chapter for the DRC. I think we need to have eyes wide open about the fact that people are dying right now, but it's not a coincidence for anyone who has seen Black Panther, that that star on the map is basically Eastern Congo.

Wakanda is what DRC could be, and we all know that. We know it has the riches in that capacity, it has that history, but it isn't, and I think that gap between what we can dare to envision in Afrofuturism, and what we actually see

is exactly the aspirational gap that the Congolese people feel.

They want that pride in their Constitution, their country, and they want that chance to choose their own path, and their own future. And so I think we have to dare to believe as partners that we can content to do that, not by choosing that future, but by making sure we are giving the Congolese people the opportunity to choose their own.

MR. O'HANLON: That's awesome. Thank you. I've just got one more question and I want to go down the row, and ask each person to comment as they wish, and maybe we'll do this in the reverse order; Tom, E.J. and Omékongo.

And I'm going to start from the perspective of having moderated a panel last week with Amy Chua, the famous Tiger Mom, who wrote a book called *Political Tribes*, about how the United States is starting to resemble a number of overseas countries where we often worry about sectarianism, tribalism, driving politics, and now we are sort creating tribes of our own. In our case more about Democrats and Republicans, less about ethnic and sectarian lines, so there is obviously some associations there as well.

My question therefore about Congo, and we've had some discussion of civil society, some discussion of political parties, is this whole political debate primarily about personality, Kabila, Kabila's popularity, or unpopularity, the abstract notion of creating a democracy where there is a transition, or are there political debates that are about issues too?

And are we starting to see any hope, whether it's in the NGO

community, or the political parties, such as they are, where people are starting to debate: This would be a good economic strategy. This would be a good plan for military reform. This will be a good way to stabilize the East? Are those kinds of debates happening any more than they might have before? Or, is the political debate mostly just about personality, and to some extent tribe?

MR. PERRIELLO: So, first of all, tribe matters, and it matters here. Whiteness was the single best indication of support for Donald Trump in the last election. We tend to, particularly those of us, frankly, who are White tend to be -- try to erase that as a factor, and only see it in other people, whether it's communities of color in our own country or elsewhere.

Tribe and different forms of identity are incredibly powerful. They are also incredibly malleable. At one point having Irish identity, I see your tie, was a very strong political identity. Now it's basically a cultural identity once a year to go drink, maybe a little stronger than that.

SPEAKER: One month a year. (Laughter)

MR. PERRIELLO: Right. So, these identities matter. Economics also matters, there's not a country in the world, where jobs and corruption do not typically end up in the top five issues, including here, that voters care about in an election. But aspiration does too. You know, one of the critiques of President Obama, who I love, was that he ran on hope and change, and people said: What the heck does that mean?

Well, if you are coming out of eight years that did not go very well in the President George W. Bush years, change, just the believe of trying

something different happens. I think one of the reasons, and I don't speak for the Congolese people, but one of the reasons I think there is so much focus on just getting to be Kabila out of office, even though many, you know, in the policy wonk community are saying, well, but on what agenda and in what way.

He is the face of status quo, he has been the President, he has been the leader in the country, and I believe the people do not see a future that is different than their past as long as that leader remains. They've tried it, right? Once you've tried something you don't keep trying it if you don't feel like is working.

Again, if his popularity ratings were at 80 percent, if people felt like, you know, they had seen the eradication of poverty, and the armed groups, and other things, you would see a very different political dynamic there. So, I think people have focused on the idea of getting rid of Kabila, both because he's the symbol, and frankly the most powerful person in the country, and people do not feel the country is going in the right direction.

Again, any country you go into, usually the question: is the country going in the wrong direction or the right direction, will tell you who is going the election. If people think the country is going in the right direction, the incumbent usually wins that election. If they don't it goes in a different way.

So, we have complex identities. I mean, my party, the Democratic Party here I think is focused on a very false debate about whether we need to focus more on race and identity, or more on the economy. Human nature, both of those things are relevant. Everybody sees their identify and their senses of

injustice as a driver, at the same time everybody wants food on their table for their families, so any party that tries to create a sense of that.

Now, what I think what great leaders are able to do, is create a sense of identity that rises above sectarian or racial divisions. I think President Obama told a story, wove a narrative of the American story that was more inclusive than it had been before that was incredibly powerful to many Americans, including many White Americans, though it also obviously created reactions.

So, I think great leaders are ones that can get people excited, not by playing down to an identity but playing up to some larger aspirations.

MR. O'HANLON: That's great. Thank you. E.J.?

MR. HOGENDOORN: Well, you know, I would argue that democracy is an evolution and a process, and I don't think, at least from my vantage point, that the DRC is yet at a point where you have robust and well-established parties arguing about platforms and different policy prescriptions. I think the biggest issue right now in the Congo is that it is a system that is dependent on unchecked patronage to maintain loyalty amongst the political class.

And I think one of the biggest frustrations for many, at least external Congo watchers, if not the people of Congo themselves, is that most politicians seem to be in it for themselves rather than for the people, and really don't care very much about what's happening in their constituencies.

And I think, at least from my vantage point, again, this is all about

electoral accountability, this will be an opportunity for people to vote on whether or not, as Tom said, they think their leaders did a good job or not. And I want to move this away from Kabila, this is not just about Kabila, right? This is about also provincial and local elections, where people have been in power I think for 12 years now, since they were --

SPEAKER: It depends on the (crosstalk).

MR. HOGENDOORN: Yeah, depends on -- but for a very, very long period of time. And I think for people, for local people to be able to choose who they represent, and more importantly, to send a signal to the political class that if you don't do your job, you will be voted out of office, is an incredibly powerful lever, and tool to give them to move the country in the direction that they wanted to.

MR. O'HANLON: Omékongo, over to you my friend.

MR. DIBINGA: The primary (inaudible) about personalities, the real issue really is economic, it's always come down to money, as it relates to the Congo. And one of the points that you made, Tom, that I'll push back on as well, is that I don't believe that the West has no interest in who wins the elections in the Congo. Our interest as it relates to this country have always been economic, I mean let's be clear.

I mean, early 1900s, our biggest challenge was Red Rubber when they were cutting off the hands of our daughters and sons, and giving them to our fathers for not producing enough rubber for companies like Dunlop, and all of these other organizations. You know, that's the Western connection. When we

move up to people like Mobutu who was discovered by George Bush Sr. in 1957, when he was working for the CIA, so I think this guy can be our guy in Congo, not our guy for the people of Congo. This is a man who survived seven U.S. Presidents.

Then you look at what happened with, you know, Kabila, the father, and how when interests started to awry with the Clinton administration and, you know, Kabila goes on the news, and says, I just hung up on them, and all this type of stuff. And he's gone a little bit shortly after that.

And then we can talk about Western interest, and then we can talk the regional interest as were mentioned before, and three weeks ago I was at the border, you know, I was on the Rwandan side of the border, and when I'm there, and everything is, you know, nice and rosy and pretty, and I'm like, well, I'd like to go over to the other side. It was like, it's not happening, you know, for obvious reasons, because of the level of stability.

And so there's obviously, you know, regional actors that are there as well, but the issues have always been economic when you have the resources of our country that are being promised to foreign entities by our leadership, when you have people who really don't care if they sell a mine, and the people get enslaved in the process of doing that, or become child soldiers, or raped and pillaged, and violated in ways that we can't even imagine, then we have to realize that the situation has always been about economics.

I really don't think that there is an interest in personalities, it's about: what can you do to help enrich the pockets of the people who are in

power, whether it's the people who are in power in the country, or the people who are supporting the leadership from overseas. So, I really don't think it's about personalities, I think at the end of the day, when we look at it, the reason I say -- as some of you all know I'm a rapper and a poet as well -- one of the things I say in my songs is, you know, the Congo is so poor because it's so rich, all the resources in the whole world they want it.

We have enough resources to feed the entire Continent but our people are starving. And it's almost that, you know, we are cursed with the richness that we have, with the wealth that we have. And so I believe that regionally, whether we are talking Rwanda, Uganda, whether we are talking Angola, Zimbabwe, whether we are talking about the United States, not necessarily with the -- well, you know, one of the things, our current President said, Mr. Trump. You know, a lot of my friends have gotten very wealthy in Africa.

That didn't happen through, you know, supplying mosquito nets. We are talking pillage, we are talking pillage. I mean can we talk about materials that are in our electronics right now that are making everything run right now, and out of those resources most likely come from the genocide?

Yes, I said genocide that is taking place in the Congo. I mean, let's call it what it is, where we have at one point, over what, 25 different rebel groups operating in there, sending different places, you know, resources out to Dubai and China, and all that sort of type of stuff going unchecked. That's economic, and the personality is: what personalities can help us get the most money out of this place?

And that's why it's very important to support the people on the ground who currently feel like they don't have a say in what's going on. It's not my people in Eastern Congo don't want to stop producing the minerals that are in our phones, and in our televisions, they want to get paid for it, they want to get a livable wage, they want health insurance, they want to be able to not have to work from sunup to sunset, or for the mine collapsing on them.

And so people are going to -- and that's what people are in the street fighting for. You know, we've experienced, you know, violence all of our lives, you know, when my father goes there, and he's in prison and stretched in four different directions and made to clean prisons with tooth brushes, you know, under the Mobutu Regime, that's fighting for change, that's because he's fighting for change.

When my mom has to go on television and pleas for his release, you know, it's because we are fighting for change. So, one of the things we have to understand, is that the people on the ground who are protesting, protest nonviolently because violence has been used on us in so many ways to keep us down, and keep certain people in power.

And the only personality that the people want on the ground, are the people who are going to care and work for them, that is diametrically opposed to what the international community wants for Congo, and that has always been the case. Why would it change now? Unless, we who are here are going to really work so to making that happen.

But I don't know, in a country where we have our own voter

suppressing issues in the United States, what are we really going to do over there to help? Just a question. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: I've got one follow up, and then we will go to hear from our DRC friends, from the government, and then we'll hear from all of you.

Omékongo, powerful words, and a lot of reality behind them, and I, you know, I find myself nodding my head, but I want to know what to do. What's the most practical thing that we can do? You alluded to working with people on the ground, are there any particular things that you would ask an American audience or, you know, a multinational audience here to consider in the way we can contribute to work with, not against, or not above, but with Congolese reformers in this particular election cycle.

MR. DIBINGA: Absolutely! One of the things we have to do, the most important thing is avoid the top-down approaches. You know, we've lost -- I don't know if we've ever had it, but as a country we've lost the moral authority to be able to talk to people what they need to do. So, what people in this room need to do is we need to work person-to-person.

Our level of telecommunication is at a level it's never been. The ability to actually reach out and talk to people on the ground, and it's not about talking to people on the ground to figure out how they can overthrow the government and all of that, we are not talking about that, we want to avoid violence in any way possible.

We want to work with people on the ground: how can we support

you in efforts to make the government more accountable? So, one of the questions we can ask of those who are policy folks in here is, you know, how many Congolese do we actually know? How many people are we actually working with? How many times have we, you know, made trips to the Congo, seen what's going on? How many times have we gone through a nongovernmental approach and able to do that, but let's go back.

I mean, even before that, like, what do we really know about what's taking place? I mean, you know, one of the things is that -- one of the challenges is that many people get involved in this policy work, and development work because of movies that they saw, right. You know, the Congo, gorillas in the mist, the air up there. I've got to help those people.

Do you know what I mean? It's like, you know, what are we really doing to educate ourselves? Some of us have to do a complete reset and go back and actually understand what do I really know about the Congo? And you know, (inaudible) no doubt. You know, what do I really know about the Congo? What has informed me? Where does my information come from? Have I been reading Congolese scholars? Have I been reading primarily Western scholars who are putting out misinformation, who don't really have a true balance?

But how willing are we to really do that work, because to reeducate ourselves may challenge everything that we've been learning for the last 10, 15 years; right? So, I believe that we, in this room, have the ability with our communications, with our influence, to really start to work towards ground-to-ground connections, to really engage -- and many of us in here are already doing

it.

And for those who are already doing it, we need to show other people who are looking to do that, how to do it. So, I'm not saying something that can't be done, because I'm looking at faces here I've been seeing for like 20 years, who I know are already doing the work, and we need to enhance their voices as well, just because they may not be a government representative, or may not head a big international agency, it doesn't that they have real experiences on the ground.

When we talk about Stand With Congo, when we talk about organizations like that, we need more people-to-people connections.

MR. O'HANLON: Awesome. Thank you. Okay. If I could ask for brief comment, please, from our friends at the Embassy, I don't know which one of you wanted to make a comment. But whoever is going to, and we can start here with the microphone, please, for two or three minutes, before we go to the audience.

MR. BIN KARUBI BARNABÉ: Okay. Thank you very much. First of all, my name is Kikaya Bin Karubi Barnabé, I'm the Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the President. I'm not the Ambassador here. I happened to be in Washington, D.C., when I heard that there was this panel, and obviously I was interested to come, and especially because I was hoping to see my good friend, Tom Perriello.

Now, I have seven-page narrative that I prepared, I'm not going to read it, don't worry. In this narrative I have addressed some of the issues that were tackled here, it's available. If anyone is interested they can give their email

address to our Embassy representatives here, they will email it to them.

In it, it addresses six points; one is the implementation of the Political Agreement of the 31st December, 2016. Number two, the imperative of DRC elections for 23 December, 2018; number three, political relaxation, measures already taken and specific dossier; number four, the stability of political institutions, efforts for peace in the Great Lakes, the issue of ethnic conflict that was addressed here. Number 5, the protection of civil liberties, the forbidden marches of the Lay Coordination Committee, those are the Catholics; and then number six, economic development and business climate in the DRC.

All that, I mean this narrative gives the government point of view on these six issues. And anybody who is interested, as I said, they give their email address to our Embassy.

Now having said that, let me just emphasize one point. Elections are a certainty, elections will definitely happen on December 23, 2018. A second certainty is that President Kabila will not be a candidate. He has said it time and again, and I don't see why people are still doubting that a change of Constitution may happen, he may find another way of doing the slippage that we are talking about here; the *glissement*, which is a very nice French word, made in the DRC, that will not happen.

It will not happen, and as a matter of fact, even the Catholic Church, which stepped into the political arena, having seen that the Vatican was not with them, as a matter of fact the Vatican recalled the (inaudible) Apostolic, their Ambassador to the DRC.

They changed Cardinal Monsengwo, they appointed a successor because the Vatican did not agree with the marches that has divided the Catholic Church which is, as Tom Perriello said, the most powerful organization in the country. Now, the Catholics themselves are now inviting people to prepare for the elections. The electoral cycle in the DRC, of course we are focusing on December 23, because that's when we will know our new President, but the electoral cycle in the DRC is 11 elections, and this cycle will end in 2020 as a matter of fact.

So, it will continue, it's a continuous process that will go all way to the year 2020 when we elect our mayors, our Councilor Comino, our servicing sector, and so on.

Just a quick word on the humanitarian crisis, of course the Congo is one of the few African countries with more than 400 ethnic groups. Your question about personalities, or tribalism, or I don't know what, is very pertinent. Why? Because, take the Hema-Lendu conflict, for example, which has ended in the displacement of more than one million people, in the Djuju territory in the Ituri Province, that conflict has been latent ever since King Leopold, that Mr. Omékongo was talking about, it is always there, it will take just a small spark for it to erupt again.

The *communis apu* thing, is something which is latent. The conflict between the Pygmies and the Bantus in the Tanganyika Province, and something that is always there, but the most important thing here is for the central government to establish state authorities in all these areas.

Now having said that, we all know where we come from, I like the context, how it was put here. We have an Army which is in the construction, the same goes for our Police Force, these two institutions are in construction in a country as large as the United States East of the Mississippi River. This is a huge territory with, as I said, 400 ethnic groups, it's not going to happen overnight, but it will happen one day, we hope.

I like the fact that people here say that the Congolese people are very positive. Now, let me (speaking in foreign language), I will end there. (Speaking in foreign language), those are confidence-building measures. We have done our part, we have opened the media space, we have released prisoners and so on, but the international community must help us also.

Why? If the United States, the European Union, and some other countries continue to sanction our officials who are in office, these are not confidence-building measures, you are just making matters worse, because the people that you have sanctioned are the people in office. Are the very people, take the Minister for State Security, you sanction him, but I'm not talking about the United States, your country knows, it has its reasons why it has sanctioned, and maybe Mr. Perriello can explain to us why so much -- our officials were sanctioned.

But you take the European Union, when they sanction people, they believe that these sanctions are meant for public opinion. Why? They sanctioned somebody called Ungunjolo in the Katanga Province, this person saw electric light for the first time in his life when he was arrested in North Katanga,

and brought to Lubumbashi to prison.

He has never moved more than 100 kilometers from the place where he was born, and yet there were sanctions, all his belongings in banks were frozen, and can't have a visa, he didn't know -- even know what a passport means. But, yet, the European Union sanctioned him saying that, okay, all this assets overseas have been frozen. Talk to him about a bank, he doesn't know.

So, once again, all these measures that are taken, whether it's by the United States, or the European Union, or the international community as a whole, are not helping in confidence-building within the Congo. I thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, sir. What I'd like to do now, is take about three questions, and then we'll go back to our panel, and they can respond to what we just heard here, as well as the questions that we are about to get from you. So, why don't we begin over here on the side with the gentleman in the green sweatshirt, and we'll work our way over.

QUESTIONER: Well, Barnabé is my friend, and Tom, we go along. I'm going to look at what Barnabé just said and --

MR. O'HANLON: Please identify yourself too, and just one question per person. We are going to move quickly here (crosstalk).

QUESTIONER: There are so many issues that have been raised by Barnabé that I would like to address, and if you can --

MR. O'HANLON: I'm just going to ask you to do one, because I want to include a lot of people. So, please, just focus on whatever is most important to you, if you could.

QUESTIONER: The most important thing for me too is this: the people of Congo have not been included in any of the decisions that have been made. Whatever we proposed in regard to solving the crisis in Congo has never been taken into account. Today, we have two pieces. One understanding that the international community is embracing for elections, and one that is the Congolese saying, no, we don't want election with Mr. Kabila.

So the issue, as you say, that the international community is not really involved in looking at the situation, is not correct, because you have your position, and Congolese have their position. How do we get the position of Congolese to be heard and taken into account? When you talk about, just one example, the *communis apu* issue that Barnabé mentioned, it's not an issue of people fighting among themselves, it was the crisis created by Kinshasa.

We can talk along about that and there are many issues -- the Congolese are not fighting against each other, the Congolese have lived through a lot and they know that they should not be fighting against each other, so we have to change the narrative, the narrative that is being given by the government is the one that is valued, whereas the narrative that is given by the Congolese is not heard.

And I will have the time to address with E.J. the international crisis, after this, if we can talk about that.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Now, I'll go over here to the gentleman in the tan jacket about three rows in.

QUESTIONER: Thank you so much. My name is -- I'm sorry I'm

late, I was supposed to be having some (inaudible), pardon. But let me explain myself. My name Jean-Pierre Ruhasha, I'm the Executive Director of Congo Today. Congo Today is a non-profit organization registered in the USA, operating in DRC.

I thank you for what you said, it's very deep, and again, for your question it's: What were we doing? We gave 400, as the Ambassador said; the Diplomatic Ambassador said that we have 400 tribes in the Congo. I think it's more than that, and they are all divided, as they said. I will give you the sample example, I'm from Eastern Congo where I was born, when we understand under my own tribe was fighting with the other tribe, Babembe, from since I was born.

The other tribe over there, they've been divided for a decade. This is when I was born, it's not just recently, but it started as the Ambassador said. Well, this issue has been going on for a long, long time, it started from Lumumba, it started from a long time ago, until now, it's still there.

But I just want to thank President (inaudible), this current President, he was trying to do reconciliation, which is what we proposed to him. I think in the Congo there are two issues, to be brief --

MR. O'HANLON: Please get to a question, if you don't mind.

QUESTIONER: Yes. There is two issues: one, there is culture issues that's been divided us for a long time, and there is a political issue that's going on right now. But what the real issue of Congolese right now, the real issue is it just to get the President to be elected or to have some President to be in? Or, it's an issue of developing, or creating a real economic development for

the solution of the people?

I think to get the President out, or to change the President, it's a very minor issue. The issue is, how could we build the peace and stability and economic for our people that have been divided for a long time? And we did, our NGO, Congo Today, we did it. Just give one minute, I'm finishing on this.

We did it, we did the reconciliation, we are doing the reconciliation with the tribes, as we are divided. We are doing education and training to those people, to understand to agree, to disagree, to be together, and we are doing -- creating the jobs as he was saying, we are trying to help them to create jobs, we are connecting with them with the investors to be able to support themselves.

That's what we are doing, and I'm calling to everybody to support that. That's what will bring the solution and the peace and stability for our country. It's not to sanction the people, it's not to do anything else, it's to support peace and stability for the country to be developed. Thank you so much.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: And I welcome everybody who wants to ask questions I can provide them a website, and the solution we have for the country, and we are ready for it.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Okay, I've got time for one question, or maybe for the first question; although these comments have been very eloquent as well. Yes, my friend in the back?

QUESTIONER: Thank you so much for this opportunity. My name is Pacimo Balama, and I've just come from Goma, in the eastern part of

the Democratic Republic of Congo. The question is addressed to the representative of the Government, of the Congolese Government, about the election in Congo. (Inaudible) on 1st March, and two days before to come here, you know, there are so many people who had been killed in Congo.

You know, actually, I think the situation is really very, very bad in my country, and unfortunately, people don't have food to eat, for example. They don't have access to good education, they don't have -- women are still raped. You know, my colleague said, there is so many rival groups in the eastern region, and I think the situation is really, very, very bad.

As a human rights activist, I think you know, always you know the situation is really very, very bad, and people are not free, you know, to protest, and recently even in the church, you know, people have been shooting in the church, and I think the situation is really very, very bad. And for me, saying that Kabila will organize the election, I think it's not true.

Kabila just wants to stay there, and as we can see, he -- don't have any will, you know, to organize the election, and let me tell you that Congolese people are really suffering. Women are raped, children are lost, they (inaudible) of their relatives, their parents, during the conflict, and sure, there is always other ethnic conflicts but, you know, people who are suffering are women and children.

I think all of us need to be really involved and try to see how we can help, and to find a solution to support Congolese people. My question is, how can we be sure that the Congolese Government will organize the election

when the President is still give order, you know, to kill people who are protesting, people who really want to have the change? I think as Congolese, we need the change, because you know the situation is really very bad, and that is really very, very important for us. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Thank you. Powerful words, mostly a statement, a little bit of a question, and I want to therefore get a couple more questions as well. I think the way I'm going to do this, calling an audible, because I'm hearing a lot of very passionate and eloquent statements.

I think what we'll do is see if we've got a couple of questions, as well as whatever else is offered, and then just have one final round of wrap up. So, I'm going to encourage my colleagues on the panel to take notes and respond selectively to what they most wish to respond to. And I will give our friend from Kinshasa a chance also to address whatever has posed to him, or the Ambassador, if he wishes. So, that will be our process, and we'll start here in the front row. So, I'm just going to take three or four more, and then we'll wrap up.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Jennifer Lynn-Scott, IRI. Two very, very quick questions, but they are questions. Firstly, the electoral law, I want to ask if you are concerned, I know that it's successful to a point in limiting the number of political parties, which is necessary, but are you concerned at all with the combination of increasing the threshold, the 1 percent threshold and increasing the candidate fee? Because it seems like the combination of that might create very significant barriers to all, but three, four parties that are mostly majority, maybe one or two coalition -- opposition coalitions, none of whom are likely to

have candidates that the majority of the Congolese people are very supportive of, so, especially in the provinces. So, that's one question.

The second question, you mentioned SADC, and being encouraged by the greater interest you are seeing, in regional governments. I was in Kinshasa last week and I met with some people at the Angolan and South African embassies, I agree with the greater interest, I wasn't -- I think maybe I thought it was too soon to be encouraged by that interest, so I just wondered if you could speak a little bit more about that. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Then I'll move to the back. We've got a woman in white and the stripe shirt, and then I think two questions at the very back after that.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Jerri Reid, CARE International. My question for the panel is related to the upcoming Donor Conference on DRC which will be held in Geneva in April, hosted by, if I recall, the Dutch, EU and UAE Governments. I understand that one of the focuses of the Donor Conference, and I'm interested to get your take on this, will be bringing in the private sector as well as regional actors to, not only raise funding, but to work on trade, political issues, international development issues, as is being raised by the panel, extractives are a big issue that we can't exclude from our discussions, of the situation in Congo.

I mean, I'll be interested to hear from the panel, particularly those with diplomatic experience among you, do you see a tension in bringing in the private sector and in bringing in governments such as the UAE and other so-

called non-traditional donors, into a situation where the U.N. is trying to raise funds for a humanitarian response, and ongoing development program? Or is there not a tension, and could you give us your sort of reflections on that, if there isn't one? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Let's take two more. The two gentlemen in the back right next to you, and right there, with the red tie, and then to his left.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Good morning. Alex (Inaudible) Defense, I live here in D.C. One question about the future of the U.N. Mission in Congo, MONUSCO, its mandate is supposed to expire on the 31st of March, in a couple of weeks. It will be renewed, but what do you think is going to MONUSCO's role in the elections? Are they going to be sent to the provinces to oversee the ballots -- that each ballot is counted properly? MONUSCO has a terrible reputation right now. It has been involved in, you know, sexual abuse scandals by a lot its peacekeepers, but will the Mission be used as sort of the neutral force to make sure that when the elections take place they will be fair? Thank you.

MR. MORGAN: Good morning. I'm Scott Morgan, I do Security and Defense analysis, and work in Central Africa as well. My question, to tie off with the lady from CARE: right now we know that the mining law in the Congo is currently being reviewed for the last two weeks, you know, how do you supposed -- what impact do you expect that to have on the upcoming elections?

Will that create a source of revenue to fund the elections? Will it be done, or will the (inaudible) be done, will we see such wave that we'll actually see an increase in fighting, as people jockey for positions to get their share of the

pie, before the laws actually even pass in parliament?

MR. O'HANLON: Okay, great. We've got a lot on the table. I think I'll turn, if you like, Tom, you can kick off with whichever of those you want to address, and then each person can, hopefully, take one or two, and then we will give a word to the Embassy at the end as well.

MR. PERRIELLO: Thanks, for all of the commentary, and the questions. I started out by emphasizing that the international community, and particularly the West, does not matter as much as people think. That doesn't mean it doesn't matter. And I do think that we continue to benefit from strong bipartisan support in the United States for engagement with the DRC, and for the importance of alternance and of human rights.

You have to remember in our system that the budget actually begins in Congress, not with the President, and we have strong Republicans and Democrats, on both the Senate and the House side, who continue to feel very strongly, have concerns with the Kabila administration, both for human rights abuses and failures to pursue democratic elections, that has led to not just calls for sanctions, but actual sanctions.

I imagine you and I are going to continue to disagree about the effectiveness, I think they've been incredibly effective. I think that people need to know there are consequences, consequences of opening fire -- opening fire on crowds, consequences of delaying elections. And I think that there are a lot of people in the administration who have paid very close attention to the fact that those consequences can be personal on their finances, on their travel.

I don't commend the Trump administration often, but the decision to sanction Dan Gertler I think was an incredibly strong statement, one that continues to have bipartisan support on the Hill, that those who profit off of the pillaging of Congo, and those who choose to continue doing business with them, will have very real economic consequences in the area.

So, we do continue to see that. Obviously Ambassador Haley has travelled to the DRC, which I think was a statement of support. I think one of the tensions we are driving into here, and we all know that this is what a lot of the next few months is going to be about, is this question about (a) how certain are the elections to happen? And (b) what are the quality of those elections?

And we have two, frankly, quite credible positions that are totally at odds with each other. One is clearly, President Kabila needs to remain in the presidency, and oversee these elections, and the other that I hear from almost every Congolese person I talk to is, no credible elections will ever happen under President Kabila.

These are two contradictory arguments. One view is we are moving forward, he's the President, it would be incredibly destabilizing to move away from that, and the other view is they will either never happen, or will only happen under a highly corrupt and potentially violent circumstances.

As a diplomat I look at that and I see that as an unresolved situation, and I think that's frankly what the next six months are going to be about. Every deadline that the Kabila administration misses will be another argument for the transitions on Kabila. Every deadline that is made, and every

confidence building made, I think will reinforce the idea that we need to muddle through to those elections.

It's not my call, and not only because it's not my country, but because I don't have a formal role with the government, or with our government anymore, but as an observer, I will say that's the train wreck that's coming. We are either going to see that debate escalate of the idea or need for a technocratic or caretaker government to oversee the election process.

And I think this comes back to what several of the questions got at right now, which is that there is no trust in the DRC, not only of the government, I think the government does not trust the international community or see it as an ally, and does not trust many in the opposition. And then a lack of trust, everything from the mining law to the party laws, everything else, will rightly be seen with some skepticism.

Is this one step more towards manipulating elections, and denying choices as we go forward? And I think this comes back to, and I'll just end with the private sector, MONUSCO points, I'll be very blunt, there is no private sector interest in the DRC right now. Nobody is going to make serious investments, they will cut deals for future mining rights, but no one is investing until after this election crisis is over.

The U.N. had a massive Private Investment Conference, the Secretary General came, and it came right in the middle of this. The failure to meet the last two election deadlines has cost Congo billions and billions of dollars, nobody is making long-term infrastructure investments, they are not

doing things that you only look at when you get a 10 or 20-year return on that investment.

So, the effort to reach out to the private sector is there, we can agree on whether it's good or bad, but the reality is, if you were an investor thinking of making a serious investment, and there is this much uncertainty on the table, you are going to hold off on that.

Now, are there exceptions, if there's oil drilling off seas, things that may be protected from disbelief that this could end with civil unrest? And I think that just comes back to this point that ultimately one of the reasons why there has been so much alignment between some of the Western countries and some of the African regional governments is a joint conclusion about what drives stability.

We haven't come at it from the same angle about President Obama's position was to start with the Constitution, almost from a normative perspective that that's important to protect. Every meeting I had in the region said we couldn't care less about anything other than stability, and if we thought that more President Kabila equals more stability, we would be backing him. We think we have lost confidence that that is the case, and we are moving forward, and I really appreciate the certainty of the guarantees that Mr. Kikaya has given to day.

On the MONUSCO point, ultimately I think (a) it has to be involved, it has to have some observing. I think where it has been present at the protest, it has been somewhat of a deterrent, the escalation by the security

forces. It simply doesn't have the nationwide perspective for a country that is as vast as DRC that we can expect it under its current size to do everything, but it certainly needs to be a part of that equation.

So, I'll just end by saying, on the U.S. side, I think we continue to see strong bipartisan support. I've just come from the Vatican, I think the Vatican does remain very committed to protecting civil society and protecting human rights, and I think there will be tactical questions about how that's done, but they remain very committed to what they see as the will of the Congolese people.

Within Congo itself, I think this question is really going to come down to transition with Kabila or without Kabila, and I think as long as we see the President and the administration taking serious steps towards elections that that will be credible, that train will continue, and I think if that confidence continues to be undermined you will see the voices rise stronger and louder, for the idea of a transition ask on Kabila.

So, this is a tense time. The upside, gains, I think are enormous, but this remains something where many very vulnerable communities are at great risk, and we hope and pray that those leaders in a position to effect this change will do so in the greatest interest to the Congolese people.

MR. O'HANLON: Super, Tom. Thank you. E.J., to you, please?

MR. HOGENDOORN: Well, I'll try to be brief, I do think that there's a barrier to entry for politicians, and I do think that that's an issue. What is the right balance to strike in terms of trying to limit the number of small parties that exist, and so forth, is a really technical one, and I think it's, to some degree,

conflict-specific. I'm happy to kind of go into the weeds with you on that, on the sidelines.

But I recognize that, and hopefully, I recognize that in my presentation, is that I do think it's a positive development that we are seeing an attempt to try to simplify the ballot, to try to force opposition parties to work together, and to form coalitions, and to be in a position to actually mobilize significant portions of the population and be a political weight, rather than just a gadfly.

That said, and it comes up, but I should, you know, emphasize this. There will be a lot of political jockeying over the next year. And I should say, and this is a concern to us because it's not just a concern in the DRC, but it's almost around any election, but particularly in the DRC which has a violent history, is that there will be an incentive by politicians, and I'm not talking about Kabila, I'm talking about local-level politicians as well, to use violence for political purposes.

I mean one of the allegations behind the violence in Ituri is that this actually the beginning of an attempt to try to manipulate who was going to be in certain spots to be able to vote. You know, this is just -- it's bare knuckle, atrocious politics, but it's a reality that I think we need to be paying attention to. And that certainly will be a role that MONUSCO will need to play, and the human observers within the mission, especially.

There was also a question about SADC in the region. I was using SADC as shorthand for neighboring states to a large degree. We can talk about

SADC as an institution in neighboring states, as separate ones, but I think what's important, and Tom mentioned it, the region is waking up to the importance of these elections. And I think that Stern asked the right questions, and I think that's an important development because that will be the most important external actor that is going to be influencing what Kabila things and what he does over the next 10 months. And I think that needs to be respected.

There was question about the private sector, I think there is a tension, but I think people also need to recognize that particularly when it comes to development, that money is drying up particularly when it comes to European Union and the U.S. And so, you know, development specialists, governments are looking to the private sector to make up that gap.

People may not like that or not, but the reality is that when it comes to development, the West, at least, and I would say this is the same for the Chinese, they are looking to private sector developments to provide that economic growth that the country is calling for.

And last, but not least, I really, really want to stress this. I think, again, you know, this is a journey when it comes to democracy for DRC. The next elections are critical, but they are only the beginning of a process.

We are not going to have a perfect government in 2019, and what I think is really, really important is for the Congolese people to start building a culture of electoral accountability, sending messages to their political class, that if they don't do the right thing, if they continue to practice politics that has practiced in the DRC for the last 40, 50 years, they are going to get voted out of office, and

there are going to be consequences. And I think that will be a significant step forward for the country.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent! Omékongo, because you are such a great motivational speaker I want to finish with you. And so I want to give our friends, Mr. Kikaya, and or anyone else from the Embassy the chance to briefly respond to any of the questions that were addressed to you, if you wish. No obligation, but if you wish, feel free.

MR. BIN KARUBI BARNABÉ: Well, thank you. First of all, a transition without Kabila is not an option. How do you do that without going -- how do you do that without going out of the Constitution? What you would be doing is you'll be giving --

MR. O'HANLON: Hi, hi. Wait a minute. We are going to let him finish. There have been a lot of viewpoints expressed, they've all been very eloquent, I want to hear this one. We all should.

SPEAKER: I also agree with you.

MR. BIN KARUBI BARNABÉ: The Constitution says clearly, in its Article 70, second paragraph, that the incumbent President is replaced by an elected President. When you talked about the transition without Kabila, how are you going to get somebody to replace him? That's the question. Then you are going to throw the Constitution into the Congo River, what you'd be doing by doing that, is giving him the opportunity, he's the man. Tom Perriello just said here, that he's the most powerful man in the land. You are giving him an opportunity to do something funny.

Now, the only option the Congolese people have taken as an option that elections are the only way to become President of the Congo. Not somebody chosen because he operates on women, or he's a Cardinal or whatever, no. Elections are the only way to become President in the Congo. So, I repeat and I think even the opposition parties in the Congo have come to understand that.

Secondly, President Kabila is not the one who organizes elections. I think we agreed that elections are organized by an independent Electoral Commission called the CENI, and they are doing that. Mrs. Haley was in Congo, she met the CENI, and she's the one who even gave us the deadline of December 2018, to have an elected President. And I said it here, we will have one on the 23rd of December of this year.

Finally, the lady at the back there who just came from Goma, made a very emotional plea about people suffering in the East. Of course, the East is the place where Mr. Omékongo said more than 20 armed groups are roaming around the area. We have the FDLR, people who were responsible for the genocide in Rwanda. We have the ADF who are turning into a terrorist organization. The Army is putting pressure on all these armed groups.

It goes without saying that the population will end up running away from the villages. Now, if that's also a policy to get people away from the places where they are supposed to vote, I don't know, but the fact of the matter is that the pressure that the Army is putting on all these groups that have been committing atrocities in Eastern Congo is the one which is causing all the havoc

and the miseries in Eastern Congo. I think I've addressed everything that I thought -- Oh, the mining --

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you --

MR. BIN KARUBI BARNABÉ: Excuse me, just one more word about the Mining Law. Congo is known and we read that in every single article, is known as a rich country with the poorest population. Now, the Mining Law of 2002 was a law that was signed at a time when we needed to lure foreign capital to come to the Congo. We were just out of a war, so it was a law that was favorable to international investors.

Now, many years later, and by the way, I will give you one metal, cobalt, at that time when these people made their business plans profit included, cobalt was being sold at \$18,000 per ton. That was then. They made the business plans, they invested, they have recuperated all the money invested. Now, today, as we speak, cobalt is being sold at \$86,000 per ton, from 18,000.

Now, the New Mining Law says that the super profit that mining companies are making, let's share 50/50, so the new law is more than a necessity, so that at least something can get to the people, and the issue has been politicized to an extent that the people were waiting to see what President Kabila was going to do with that.

By the way, the law has been promulgated, I'm a member of a Commission that has been put in place to see with the mining companies who are complaining, how we can accommodate their concerns in the mining the regulation which will be a bylaw that will go hand-in-hand with the Mining Law.

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, sir. Now we are going to give the floor to Omékongo, and he will have the last word. So, let me say, I want to thank everybody who has been here. Thank the panelists, they've been fantastic. J.D. Steer with Stand With Congo, a lot of other friends in the group, Congo Today; Dane Erickson with Eastern Congo Initiative, a lot of people who were doing what Omékongo told us to do, and which we'll have to do more of.

So, sir, why don't I let you wrap this up, and point us, I hope, in a hopeful direction for this important year in DRC?

MR. DIBINGA: Sure. Number one, there's been so many comments about how 400 ethnic groups in the Congo is divided, and so on and so forth. Yes, we understand that there ethnic tensions, but at the end of the day, if we keep putting that argument out there, and it starts to turn into a narrative that argues for a patronizing type of mentality, they are all unified, we have to bring the people -- be the people to bring them together. Congolese people have come together when they've needed to over time, and we have to continue to work with them to make that happen.

Number two, as it relates to electoral laws, I think that is very important that these different groups that on the ground, they do start to consolidate, because we don't want a situation where we've had, let's say, in the Election of 2016 in the United States where it pretty much came down to a situation of divide and conquer.

Where you have, you know, people getting these small

percentages of the votes from different particular groups, so if you've got 80 different people running for President, then we have to figure out -- the people should figure out ways to consolidate that, so they are bringing as much of a united front as possible. I think the smaller number of parties the better. We can talk about the barriers to entry but, I think smaller is better, as it relates to that.

I think these privatization conversations, donor conferences, and the like, if no conversations are taking place that have anything to do with human rights on the ground when these policies and things are going to be taken over and implemented, then I have to question the intentions of any organization that's seeking to do work on the ground, because they will again, become part of the problem, and not part of the solution.

One of the problems with development is that many people don't know what to develop meant in the first place. So, we need to do some better work in understanding that.

MONUSCO, observer missions, United Nations has been an observer to our demise, and it oftentimes a willing participant in our demise, and so I don't see what they are going to do that's going to be helpful for the situation because they haven't done anything to date. Their presence in the future based on their presence in the past, unless they make some changes, is really just not going to do anything of benefit to the Congolese people.

Lastly, this is not part of my comments, but a comment that was made that a transition has to be made with Kabila in power. Many of the transitions that have taken place in Congo have not gone through an electoral

process. And that has indeed been part of our problem, but when I'm looking at issues of Mugabe, I'm looking at, you know, South Africa, I believe that if the people lead the leaders will follow.

And at the end of the day whether Kabila stays there, or not, or whether it's a doctor who becomes President, to me it doesn't really matter how it happens. What the concerns to me is that whatever happens going forward, is something that happens by the will of the people. And if the people are deciding that Kabila can be the person to see through these elections, then if there's a real respect for the people then he has to go.

If Kabila is going to continue to, you know, speak about the things that need to happen for the Congo, and then continue to act in that manner, then by all means, he can work with the Congolese people towards making that change. But if Kabila, going towards December, wants to become an enemy to the direction of the people, then I believe, by default, he loses his right to be able to stay there.

I do believe in Congolese solutions for Congolese problems, I do believe that we have to have a leadership that really cares about the Congolese people. I do believe that history matters, and we need to pay attention to what people have been doing in the Congo. And so to end on a motivational point, I do believe at the end of the day that success is better together, and I do believe at the end of the day that we have more things in common than we do that are different. And I believe that if Kabila is serious about making these changes happen like you said, he's going to stick to that, and I believe that, you know, you

say that, we are going to hold him to that.

If the people in here can continue to work on the ground with people and we can continue to have positive conversations, then we can have a Congo for the Congolese people. It is yet to happen, except for maybe like the year in 1960, or something. But, like, it is yet to happen. But I am an optimist, and I believe that we can make it happen, but we have to hold everybody accountable, and the only way we can do that really is by continually having conversations like this, and just remembering, at the end of the day that success is not an event, it's a process.

Like we said, going into 2019, whatever is going to happen we need to keep building, keep building, keep building, but I believe that working with the Congolese and respecting the will of the Congolese people, we can make this happen.

MR. O'HANLON: Many thanks to all of you. And please join me.

(Applause)

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