

# THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## UPCOMING ELECTIONS WILL SHOWCASE DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

BY PAUL TRUSTFULL



CENI campaign for election

As the presidential election of November 28 draws closer, Pastor Daniel Ngoy Mulunda grows visibly excited. The date is significant not only for the citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but for the entire African continent as well. It marks the second democratic elections in the DRC and reveals a country reborn—a country for the people, by the people.

### Big Country, Big Plans

**T**he DRC is massive: It is nearly the size of Western Europe and is home to more than 70 million people. As Africa's third-largest country, the DRC faces a critical test before the global community to prove its resiliency and commitment to change.

Pastor Mulunda recently welcomed former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson to the DRC. Richardson, who is also a former ambassador to the UN, lauded the country's progress and voiced American support of the DRC's people.

Only a few years ago, the DRC was ravaged by civil war, widespread malaise

and a general sense of suffering. Since then, its current leader, President Joseph Kabila, has transformed the DRC into an economic powerhouse. By beginning to tackle institutional issues within the country, Kabila has slowly but surely begun to change perceptions of this Central African nation.

Pastor Mulunda, a veteran of African political cycles and a leader of the DRC's Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), is facing a very important task: to assure the people of the DRC and the world that his country will perform the duties of democracy.

"We need to change our future through the polls," Mulunda states confidently. "This power to select our destiny should be in our mind at all times."



CENI President Pastor Daniel Ngoy Mulunda (right) with Deo Kasongo, chairman of communications agency TBWA

## Dedicated to Ensuring Fair Elections

Mulunda left the DRC in 1988 to join the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi, Kenya, then pursued a degree in the U.S. at the request of Bishop Desmond Tutu. He was training in Lome, Togo, during the horrific Rwandan genocide, but returned in 1996 to the DRC to again work for the All Africa Conference of Churches.

Mulunda is hopeful that the upcoming election will be another opportunity to showcase what is great about the DRC. With more than 32 million registered voters—a national record—ensuring fair elections is critical. Many steps are being undertaken to prevent voter fraud, including a biometric system using fingerprints for voter registration. New voter cards also have been issued to assure eligibility and counter persistent concerns about double registration and other types of fraud. At the moment, Pastor Mulunda's team is scouring the list of registered voters, trying to reduce the numbers of double-registered individuals—currently fewer than 2% of those eligible.

Election officials know that the cost of failure would be immense, and as



Bill Richardson (right), former governor of New Mexico and ambassador to the UN, with Pastor Mulunda

a result are concerned about last-minute delays or errors. These would be poorly tolerated by a population that is counting on fair elections to improve its chances at a better future.

## Hope for the Future

The DRC's constitution established a decentralized republic, calling for a separation of powers between the central and regional governments. Losing credibility has been problematic in the past, and it's something Pastor Mulunda and his team are trying to avert. Recently, Burundi's elections suffered last-minute delays, creating a dangerous situation that put the country's stability at risk.

Fortunately, the international community

will play a supporting role in the elections by providing security, police and training for voting monitors and staff. The UN will also help out at some of the polling stations throughout the country, aided by the fingerprint ID cards now being issued.

Mulunda emphasizes that infrastructure will be the focal point of the election: "Reconstruction will be the talk of this election, and the political parties will each show that they are rebuilding the nation, some more so than others."

## A Pivotal Moment in History

Returning from a recent trip to the U.S. and Europe, Pastor Mulunda continues to spread the DRC's message: The time has come to present the country as a stable democracy, full of hope and energy, and an example to Africans everywhere. Mulunda encourages patience and support for the 11 presidential candidates, including current President Joseph Kabila. He also reassures foreign investors within the DRC that the elections will be fair, open and transparent.

This is certainly a pivotal moment in the history of the DRC, and a long-awaited step toward attaining peace and prosperity. ■

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Pastor Daniel Ngoy Mulunda