

Despite progress on voter registration, DR Congo faces challenges on election timeline – UN envoy

11 October 2017 – The notion that elections would most probably not be held before the end of 2017 has regrettably led to the re-emergence of a climate of political uncertainty and tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a United Nations envoy for that country told the Security Council today.

“As this Council is aware, challenges related to the implementation of the 31 December Agreement have unfortunately persisted in recent months,” said Maman Sidikou, UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for DRC, in a [briefing](#) to the 15-member body.

He explained that the broad consensus achieved among key political actors with the signing of the 31 December 2016 Agreement has not been maintained consistently throughout the year, specifically as this relates to a transitional oversight mechanism, implementation of confidence-building measures, and the electoral timelines.

The Agreement envisioned the holding of elections by the end of 2017.

He reported that as of mid-September, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) had registered over 41 million voters, with women representing 48 per cent of them.

In early September, voter registration commenced in the Kasai and Kasai Central provinces, the last remaining provinces to undergo this process. However, uncertainty persists regarding the registration of members of the Diaspora, the mode of voting and the timeline for the adoption of critical legislative enactments.

And regrettably, the financial resources required to ensure sustained progress towards the holding of elections are not yet forthcoming. The CENI remains under-funded, and the multi-partner basket support fund managed by the UN Development Programme remains funded at only six per cent of the estimated \$123 million required.

The creation of conditions conducive to the holding of elections rests largely on the implementation of confidence-building measures, the opening of political space, and the full respect of human rights, including the freedoms of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly.

The UN is concerned that journalists, political opponents and civil society activists remain subject to intimidation, harassment and violence, mostly in

connection with their activities and expression of their opinions in relation to the political process.

He went on to highlight the deteriorating security situation in several regions of the country, including targeted attacks against the national security forces by the Mai-Mai group in North Kivu.

“The impact of the deterioration of the security situation on the lives of civilian populations is clearly visible,” Mr. Sidikou said, noting that between June and August this year, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([MONUSCO](#)) reported 1,329 cases of violations and abuses of human rights.

Armed groups carried out 533 attacks, while state actors were responsible for 769 violations, of which 27 percent were attributed to the armed forces and 24 percent to the national police.

Turning to the deteriorating humanitarian situation, he said that about 8.5 million people – including 5.5 million children – are currently in need of humanitarian assistance while the number of internally displaced persons reached 3.8 million, and more than 621,000 Congolese sought refuge in the subregion.

In the face of budget cuts, MONUSCO has continuously adjusted its machinery and presence to better adapt its footprint to priorities set out by the Council, Mr. Sidikou noted. The mission will soon complete the repatriation of 1,687 military personnel, and is also in the process of introducing a new strategy, particularly in areas affected by the closure of MONUSCO bases, that provides the mission with a flexibility in fulfilling its mandate to protect civilians.

[UN chief proposes \\$5.4 billion budget for 2018-2019](#)

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The proposal (before re-costing) is about \$200 million – about four per cent – below the appropriation for the current biennium, and reflects an overall net decrease of 92 posts compared to the current budget.

“In taking the oath of office last December, I promised to work with the Member States to reform the UN thoroughly and continuously,” Mr. Guterres [told](#) the General Assembly’s [Fifth Committee](#).

“Reform is for the people we serve and, indeed, for everyone who serves under the UN flag or is part of the enterprise of building a better world for all.”

In formulating the proposal, explained the UN chief, ways to make the Organization more nimble, responsive and effective in managing its staff and resources, and in supporting its Member States were explored.

An extensive review of our internal policies and administrative instructions is under way to remove duplication, reduce fragmentation and streamline procedures, he added.

In his briefing to the Committee, Mr. Guterres spoke of the new UN strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse, strategy on gender parity, strengthening whistle-blower protection, the new counter-terrorism office and strengthening the development pillar of the Organization.

As part of the reforms, the Secretary-General noted that he is delegating managerial authority to programme managers and demanding greater accountability from them for mandate delivery; proposing changes to the UN management and support structures; and proposing measures to streamline and improve the planning and budgeting processes; measures to improve his ability as the chief administrative officer to redeploy resources within parts of the budget to better support the implementation of mandates.

“The reform proposals will not affect the budget proposal for the biennium 2018-2019,” he said.

The UN chief also noted that for the new management structure, a breakdown of functions and a costed proposal for the two new departments in 2018 will be provided. Some of the changes will be reflected in the support account for 2018/2019, and others will be accommodated within the approved staffing table for the regular budget.

The changes to the planning and budgeting cycles and documentation will come, if approved, into effect in 2020.

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“Being a girl child, I dreamt of occupying a powerful position to influence

and create change in the community. It was the segregation of women that I experienced in my childhood that gave me the strength to add my voice in everything I did.”

These are the words of Annah Chota, who last month was honoured as [International Female Police Peacekeeper](#) for her service and achievements with the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei ([UNISFA](#)).

Growing up in Harare, Zimbabwe, Ms. Chota’s awareness of the inequalities that existed between girls and boys began at an early age. The way society groomed boys for professional careers and steered girls towards domestic chores led her to start dreaming of a more equal world.

“My father had originally been disappointed by having only girl children [the four daughters were later followed by sons], but then he began to appreciate us more through the discipline and tenacity to succeed displayed by myself and my sisters. At the time of his death in 2007, he had sacrificed all to ensure that we were educated and, as he used to say, we did not need to depend on a man for survival,” she told *UN News*.

Through her life, Ms. Chota fought to “remove the fixed stereotype on the limitations of women and girls.” She left Zimbabwe to study accounting in South Africa, but had to drop out of university at the end of her second year because her father could no longer afford the fees. She was then encouraged to join the Zimbabwe Republic Police by her brother-in-law, because that would give her the opportunity to work and fund her education.

Since 2006, Ms. Chota has been developing her passion for policing. In 2014, having graduated with a degree in Business Administration, she started leaning towards gender mainstreaming. And in November 2016, she was deployed to Sudan, where she was appointed as head of the Gender and Children Affairs Unit in the police component of UNISFA.



Annah Chota (holding flag) with the UN Police Delegation during the parade of nations at the International Women and Law Enforcement Conference in Cairns, Australia, on 18 September. Photo: UNPOL

“When I arrived, there was no institutions or a government that would make the work of advancing gender equality easier, so we had to look for initiatives that would allow us to have the support of the communities, not only to promote gender equality but also to help us with prevention and protection of women from gender-based violence,” she recalled.

Through training workshops and campaigns with local communities, Ms. Chota contributed to a shift in how communities deal with rape, domestic violence, child marriage and forced marriage, by recognising marital rape as a criminal offence.

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That was the reality confronting Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota when she got to Abyei to take up her post. In response, she helped to start a new network that would allow women to speak out. The idea of creating that network came with Ms. Chota from Zimbabwe, where “women also had to find a way of disseminating the message of equality.”

Since she arrived in the field, her main concern was always to protect women and girls and that is what motivated her to start lobbying to find support. “We needed to create a space for women to speak to their leaders. We needed to empower them, through community dialogues, to report and record the crimes,” she added.

Today more women are reporting gender-based violence, and in the absence of a police service, community protection committees can now record and recognise sexual and gender-based crimes.

“The success story of Abyei is that community policing models such as the problem-oriented approach and involvement of the community in policing have really helped to build confidence in the society to report cases of sexual and gender-based violence.”

Ms. Chota was recognised for her key contributions towards restoring the public's trust in the police and encouraging children, women and men to become partners in preventing and detecting crime.



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota with Abyei Central Women's Network Leaders. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota speaks with students in Abyei, Sudan, as part of a campaign against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota assisting the community protection committee with follow-up in a rape case in Abyei, Sudan. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota engages with the community in Abyei, Sudan. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota speaks with the community in Abyei, Sudan. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota training the community protection committees on policing SGBV. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka

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In her opinion, gender equality is not an issue that only Abyei has to deal with. “Issues of gender equality are global. The world at large is male dominated, and without empowering women, gender inequality remains solidified in the society.”

Ms. Chota is the first police officer from Zimbabwe to receive the award, which recognises the outstanding accomplishments of female police officers serving with the UN and has been bestowed annually since 2011.

“To be honest, representing my country is a dream,” she said. “When people watch athletes or world leaders representing their nations, they have this feeling that they want to also do something to raise the flag of their country high. I aspired to do it.”

Upon receiving the award, Ms. Chota said that it underscores “the value of hard work, professionalism, teamwork and discipline, which every peacekeeper must exhibit.”

The UN is working to attract more policewomen to join the 1,098 female police officers from 69 countries, who are currently serving in UN peacekeeping missions. In 2009, the world body launched the “Global Effort” and has worked with Member States and national police services to recruit more female police officers into UN operations. The goal is to reach 20 per cent women in the UN Police by 2020.

Zimbabwe provides 85 police officers to UN operations in Abyei, South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)), Sudan ([UNAMID](#)), and Guinea-Bissau ([UNIOGBIS](#)), 31 per cent of whom are women.

Ms. Chota called on other women to join her in the fight for gender equality. “Strength within women is unlimited. As women, we already play multiple roles, which indicates that also in peacekeeping we can do it and we can do more. What’s important is to believe in yourself, because if we advance women, everyone will succeed.”

“Peacekeeping gives unmeasurable feelings of joy when you are able to put a smile on the face of someone whose life was ravaged by war, abuse and poverty,” she added, noting that this is what keeps her going when she misses her husband and two small boys.

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[At UN, robot Sophia joins meeting on artificial intelligence and sustainable development](#)

11 October 2017 – Artificial intelligence has the potential to accelerate progress on global development goals, but also poses a range of complex challenges, including ethical questions, human rights issues and security risks, speakers told a United Nations event today that featured a robot as one of the panellists.

A moment that drew big applause during the day-long event, '[The future of everything](#) – sustainable development in the age of rapid technological change,' came when Sophia, a humanoid robot, had brief interaction with UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed.

To Ms. Mohammed's question about what the UN can do to help people in many parts of the world who have no access to the Internet or electricity, Sophia said "the future is already here. It's just not very evenly distributed [...]," quoting renowned science fiction writer William Gibson. "If we are smarter and focused on win-win type of results, A.I. [artificial intelligence] could help proficiently distribute the world's existing resources like food and energy."

Sophia is Hanson Robotics' latest and most advanced robot. Sophia has also become a media sensation, having given numerous interviews to multiple media outlets, performed in concert, and even graced the cover of one of the top fashion magazines.

In her [opening speech](#), Ms. Mohammed warned that despite profound potential for accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), if technological progress is not managed well, it risks exacerbating existing inequalities.

"The influence of technology on our societies should be determined by the actions of us, humans, not by machines," she said. "Technology is here for us to explore and use for the benefit of all."



Sophia the robot at UN Headquarters. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

The meeting was co-organized by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UN General Assembly's main economic and financial body ([Second Committee](#)).

ECOSOC President Marie Chatardová said that the long-term consequences of the deep technological changes underway, for economies and societies at large, are unknown.

"We are only starting to see the benefits, but we do need to assess the risks of these technologies," she said.

Sven Jürgenson, of Estonia, Second Committee Chairman, said that AI-based solutions are taking his country's digital society to the next level.

He said the Government is working on a full legal and cyber-risk management framework for using fully autonomous vehicles in regular road and traffic conditions. And door-to-door robot transport will reshape how goods are shipped and delivered locally.

"Today, Internet access is a social right in Estonia. Every Estonian resident has an electronic ID and nearly all public services are accessible online, including i-Voting in Estonian Parliamentary elections," he said.

"The development of e-Estonia has not happened in one day – it took us 17 years to start from changing legislation and creating our first e-solutions," he added.