

DR Congo: days ahead 'critical' to 'historic election process' Security Council hears

With millions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) demonstrating “their commitment to the political process”, the days ahead are “critical” to what has been an “historic election process”, the top UN official in the country told the Security Council on Friday.

Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and head of the UN Stabilization Mission ([MONUSCO](#)), said that Congolese voters had shown “impressive maturity” and patience during the presidential poll, which finally took place on 30 December, two years later than originally planned.

“We must, therefore, show our collective solidarity with them, as the electoral process is finalized, and as the Democratic Republic of the Congo prepares to undertake the first peaceful transfer of power in the country’s history”, Ms. Zerrougui said via video conference.

The provisional election result declared Felix Tshisekedi the winner on Wednesday, but another leading opposition candidate, Martin Fayulu – who heads the Lamuka coalition – has now formally challenged the vote in court, accusing the authorities of electoral fraud. This opposition to the vote, said Ms. Zerrougi, had the potential “to provoke disorder throughout the country”.

According to Ms. Zerrougui, all national and international observation missions, as well as MONUSCO teams deployed on the ground, reported that despite technical, logistical and security problems, citizens had not been hindered in exercising their right to vote, adding that the delayed publication of results, had not led to any breakdown in public order.

She told the Council that reactions to CENI’s announcement had been “swift and varied”, and welcomed Mr. Tshisekedi, who vowed to be a president “for all Congolese”.

‘Supreme sense of responsibility’ must prevail

Ms. Zerrougui told Council members there had been some “serious security incidents”, including violent protests in Kwilu province that have reportedly left at least twelve dead. She said that MONUSCO teams were being deployed there to determine the facts and “engage with a view to de-escalating tension”.

Injuries, arrests and unverified deaths were also reported in Kisangani, the country’s third largest city, and several locations in Kasai province. Meanwhile a “tense situation” also prevails in several Kinshasa communes.

“I deplore all such acts of violence, and appeal to the Congolese people and security forces alike to exercise calm and restraint in this critical period”, she underscored.

With the final results expected to be announced within a week, she said she would “continue to discharge my good offices, engaging with all Congolese stakeholders, to reinforce the need for calm and recourse to established judicial procedures and to emphasize that a supreme sense of responsibility must prevail through the days ahead.”



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Leila Zerrougui (on screen-left), Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), briefs the Security Council on 11 January 2019.

‘Overriding goals’ reached by Congolese people: CENI

Also via video link, Corneille Nangaa, President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), spoke at length of the tremendous difficulties throw up by the long process towards polling day and beyond, adding that “there was not a single decision that was not challenged”.

Notwithstanding the significant snags, 40 million voters were successfully registered, and the election took place amid relative calm.

He underscored that “three overriding goals” had been achieved by the Congolese people: a refusal to accept changes to the constitution; resisting the desire for a third term the current Head of State, Joseph Kabila, who has ruled for 18 years; and that for the first time in nearly 60 years, there would now be a transfer of power at the highest level.

Mr. Nangaa paid tribute to 32 CENI staff who gave their lives in service to the democratic process, concluding that CENI “has done what it was able to

do.”

Speaking in the chamber on behalf of the African Union (AU), Fatima Kyari Mohammed informed the Council that while there had been as many as 75,000 polling stations and the AU was only able to dispatch an election mission to a limited number, reports from there had been positive.

She elaborated that the polls opened on time; all materials were available; polls were carried out in a calm and peaceful atmosphere; candidate representatives were present; and the election was conducted within the legal framework.

Joseph Malanji, Foreign Minister of Zambia, enumerated some of the “historical challenges” that the election process had thrown up, including a warehouse fire just days before the poll that destroyed thousands of voting machines, an Ebola outbreak in the east, and continuing violence.

Notwithstanding these hurdles, he made clear that the elections were managed in a “peaceful and calm atmosphere.”

Bishop urges ‘path of true peace’

In contrast, Bishop Otembi of the Catholic Bishops’ National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO) said that their analysis of the presidential election did not correspond to the CENI-announced results.

Church authorities, which play a powerful role in Congolese society, deployed around 40,000 monitors for the 30 December vote.

The bishop called for the Security Council to express its solidarity with the Congolese people, and invited the UN body to request the publication of official notes from each polling station, so that the tallies and data could be compared with those of CENI, to remove all doubt.

He urged the Council to invite the parties in the potentially fraught days ahead, to favour “the path of truth and peace”.