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Democratic Republic of Congo Profile

Timeline of key events:

1200s - Rise of Kongo empire, centered in modern northern Angola and including extreme western Congo and territories round lakes Kisale and Upemba in central Katanga (now Shaba).

1482 - Portuguese navigator Diogo Cao becomes the first European to visit the Congo; Portuguese set up ties with the king of Kongo.

16th - 17th centuries - British, Dutch, Portuguese and French merchants engage in slave trade through Kongo intermediaries.

1870s - Belgian King Leopold II sets up a private venture to colonize Kongo.

1874-77 - British explorer Henry Stanley navigates Congo river to the Atlantic Ocean.

Belgian colonisation

1879-87 - Leopold commissions Stanley to establish the king's authority in the Congo basin.

1884-85 - European powers at the Conference of Berlin recognize Leopold's claim to the Congo basin.

1885 - Leopold announces the establishment of the Congo Free State, headed by himself.

1891-92 - Belgians conquer Katanga.

1892-94 - Eastern Congo wrested from the control of East African Arab and Swahili-speaking traders.

1908 - Belgian state annexes Congo amid protests over killings and atrocities carried out on a mass scale by Leopold's agents. Millions of Congolese are said to have been killed or worked to death during Leopold's control of the territory.

1955 - Belgian Professor Antoin van Bilsen publishes a "30-Year Plan" for granting the Congo increased self-government.

1959 - Belgium begins to lose control over events in the Congo following serious nationalist riots in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa).

Post-independence turmoil

1960 June - Congo becomes independent with Patrice Lumumba as prime minister and Joseph Kasavubu as president.

1960 July - Congolese army mutinies; Moise Tshombe declares Katanga independent; Belgian troops sent in ostensibly to protect Belgian citizens and mining interests; UN Security Council votes to send in troops to help establish order, but the troops are not allowed to intervene in internal affairs.

1960 September - Kasavubu dismisses Lumumba as prime minister.

1960 December - Lumumba arrested.

1961 February - Lumumba murdered, reportedly with US and Belgian complicity.

1961 August - UN troops begin disarming Katangese soldiers.

1963 - Tshombe agrees to end Katanga's secession.

1964 - President Kasavubu appoints Tshombe prime minister.

Mobutu years

1965 - Kasavubu and Tshombe ousted in a coup led by Joseph Mobutu.

1971 - Joseph Mobutu renames the country Zaire and himself Mobutu Sese Seko; also Katanga becomes Shaba and the river Congo becomes the river Zaire.

1973-74 - Mobutu nationalizes many foreign-owned firms and forces European investors out of the country.

1977 - Mobutu invites foreign investors back, without much success; French, Belgian and Moroccan troops help repulse attack on Katanga by Angolan-based rebels.

1989 - Zaire defaults on loans from Belgium, resulting in a cancellation of development programs and increased deterioration of the economy.

1990 - Mobutu agrees to end the ban on multiparty politics and appoints a transitional government, but retains substantial powers.

1991 - Following riots in Kinshasa by unpaid soldiers, Mobutu agrees to a coalition government with opposition leaders, but retains control of the security apparatus and important ministries.

1993 - Rival pro- and anti-Mobutu governments created.

1994 - Mobutu agrees to the appointment of Kengo Wa Dondo, an advocate of austerity and free-market reforms, as prime minister.

1996-97 - Tutsi rebels capture much of eastern Zaire while Mobutu is abroad for medical treatment.

Aftermath of Mobutu

1997 May - Tutsi and other anti-Mobutu rebels, aided principally by Rwanda, capture the capital, Kinshasa; Zaire is renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Laurent-Desire Kabila installed as president.

1998 August - Rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda rise up against Kabila and advance on Kinshasa. Zimbabwe, Namibia send troops to repel them. Angolan troops also side with Kabila. The rebels take control of much of the east of DRC.

1999 - Rifts emerge between Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) rebels supported by Uganda and Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) rebels backed by Rwanda.

Lusaka peace accord signed

1999 July - The six African countries involved in the war sign a ceasefire accord in Lusaka. The following month the MLC and RCD rebel groups sign the accord.

2000 - UN Security Council authorizes a 5,500-strong UN force to monitor the ceasefire but fighting continues between rebels and government forces, and between Rwandan and Ugandan forces.

2001 January - President Laurent Kabila is shot dead by a bodyguard. Joseph Kabila succeeds his father.

2001 February - Kabila meets Rwandan President Paul Kagame in Washington. Rwanda, Uganda and the rebels agree to a UN pull-out plan. Uganda, Rwanda begin pulling troops back from the frontline.

2001 May - US refugee agency says the war has killed 2.5 million people, directly or indirectly, since August 1998. Later, a UN panel says the warring parties are deliberately prolonging the conflict to plunder gold, diamonds, timber and coltan, used in the making of mobile phones.

2002 January - Eruption of Mount Nyiragongo devastates much of the city of Goma.

Search for peace

2002 April - Peace talks in South Africa: Kinshasa signs a power-sharing deal with Ugandan-backed rebels, under which the MLC leader would be premier. Rwandan-backed RCD rebels reject the deal.

2002 July - Presidents of DRC and Rwanda sign a peace deal under which Rwanda will withdraw troops from the east and DRC will disarm and arrest Rwandan Hutu gunmen blamed for the killing of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

2002 September - Presidents of DRC and Uganda sign peace accord under which Ugandan troops will leave DRC.

2002 September/October - Uganda, Rwanda say they have withdrawn most of their forces from the east. UN-sponsored power-sharing talks begin in South Africa.

2002 December - Peace deal signed in South Africa between Kinshasa government and main rebel groups. Under the deal rebels and opposition members are to be given portfolios in an interim government.

Interim government

2003 April - President Kabila signs a transitional constitution, under which an interim government will rule pending elections.

2003 May - Last Ugandan troops leave eastern DRC.

2003 June - French soldiers arrive in Bunia, spearheading a UN-mandated rapid-reaction force.

President Kabila names a transitional government to lead until elections in two years time. Leaders of main former rebel groups are sworn in as vice-presidents in July.

2003 August - Interim parliament inaugurated.

2004 March - Gunmen attack military bases in Kinshasa in an apparent coup attempt.

2004 June - Reported coup attempt by rebel guards is said to have been neutralized.

2004 December - Fighting in the east between the Congolese army and renegade soldiers from a former pro-Rwanda rebel group. Rwanda denies being behind the mutiny.

2005 March - UN peacekeepers say they have killed more than 50 militia members in an offensive, days after nine Bangladeshi soldiers serving with the UN are killed in the north-east.

New constitution

2005 May - New constitution, with text agreed by former warring factions, is adopted by parliament.

2005 September - Uganda warns that its troops may re-enter DRC after a group of Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army rebels enter via Sudan.

2005 November - A first wave of soldiers from the former Zairean army returns after almost eight years of exile in the neighboring Republic of Congo.

2005 December - Voters back a new constitution, already approved by parliament, paving the way for elections in 2006.

International Court of Justice rules that Uganda must compensate DRC for rights abuses and the plundering of resources in the five years up to 2003.

2006 February - New constitution comes into force; new national flag is adopted.

2006 March - Warlord Thomas Lubanga becomes first war crimes suspect to face charges at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. He is accused of forcing children into active combat.

2006 May - Thousands are displaced in the north-east as the army and UN peacekeepers step up their drive to disarm irregular forces ahead of the elections.

Free elections

2006 July - Presidential and parliamentary polls are held - the first free elections in four decades. With no clear winner in the presidential vote, incumbent leader Joseph Kabila and opposition candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba prepare to contest a run-off poll on October 29. Forces loyal to the two candidates clash in the capital.

2006 November - Joseph Kabila is declared winner of October's run-off presidential election. The poll has the general approval of international monitors.

2006 December - Forces of renegade General Laurent Nkunda and the UN-backed army clash in North Kivu province, prompting some 50,000 people to flee. The UN Security Council expresses concern about the fighting.

2007 March - Government troops and forces loyal to opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba clash in Kinshasa.

2007 April - DRC, Rwanda and Burundi relaunch the regional economic bloc Great lakes Countries Economic Community, known under its French acronym CEPGL.

2007 April - Jean-Pierre Bemba leaves for Portugal, ending a three-week political stalemate in Kinshasa, during which he sheltered in the South African embassy.

2007 May - The UN investigates allegations of gold and arms trafficking by UN peacekeepers in Ituri region.

2007 June - War could break out again in the east, warns the Archbishop of Bukavu, Monsignor Francois-Xavier Maroy.

2007 June - Radio Okapi broadcaster Serge Maheshe is shot dead in Bukavu, the third journalist killed in the country since 2005.

2007 August - Uganda and DRC agree to try defuse a border dispute.

Aid agencies report a big increase in refugees fleeing instability in North Kivu which is blamed on dissident general Nkunda.

2007 September - Major outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus.

2008 January - The government and rebel militia, including renegade Gen Nkunda, sign a peace pact aimed at ending years of conflict in the east.

Renewed clashes

2008 April - Army troops clash with Rwandan Hutu militias with whom they were formerly allied in eastern Congo, leaving thousands of people displaced.

2008 August - Heavy clashes erupt in the east of the country between army troops and fighters loyal to rebel leader Laurent Nkunda.

2008 October - Rebel forces capture major army base of Rumangabo; the Congolese government accuses Rwanda of backing General Nkunda, a claim Rwanda denies.

Thousands of people, including Congolese troops, flee as clashes in eastern DRC intensify. Chaos grips the provincial capital Goma as rebel forces advance. UN peacekeepers engage the rebels in an attempt to support Congolese troops.

2008 November - Campaign by Tutsi rebel leader Laurent Nkunda to consolidate control over east prompts new wave of refugees.

UN Security Council approves temporary increase of troops to bolster the strained UN peacekeeping effort.

2008 December - Uganda, South Sudan and DRC launch joint assault on Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army bases in north-east DRC. Hundreds of civilians are killed in backlash attacks.

2009 January - Launch of joint DRC-Rwandan military operation against Tutsi rebels led by Laurent Nkunda. Campaign lasts five weeks.

Nkunda is displaced by Bosco Ntaganda and arrested in Rwanda.

2009 February - Medecins Sans Frontiers accuses UN peacekeepers of failing to protect civilians from LRA rebels.

2009 April - Hutu militia re-emerge after end of joint DRC-Rwanda campaign in east, prompting thousands to flee.

2009 May - Kabila approves law giving amnesty to armed groups as part of deal meant to end fighting in east.

2009 June - International Criminal Court orders ex-vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba to stand trial on charges of war crimes for his troops' actions in Central African Republic between 2002 and 2003.

Series of mutinies by soldiers in the east complaining they haven't been paid.

2009 July - Swiss court rules that frozen assets of ex-president Mobutu Sese Seko be returned to his family.

2009 August - US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits Goma, promises \$17 million aid for victims of sexual violence.

Head of MONUC Alan Doss declares five months of joint army-UN operations against Rwandan rebels - "Kimia 2" - to have been "largely positive."

2009 September - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay suspects October-November 2008 violence in North Kivu may amount to war crimes committed by both the army and CNDP militia.

2009 November - Germany arrests two alleged FDLR leaders on suspicion of war crimes in eastern DRC.

2009 December - UN extends mandate of MONUC for shortened five months, as a step to full withdrawal by mid-2010.

2010 May - Government steps up pressure for UN peacekeepers to quit before elections in 2011. UN's top humanitarian official John Holmes warns against premature departure.

2010 June - Prominent human rights advocate Floribert Chebeya found dead a day after being summoned to meet the chief of police.

Celebrations mark 50 years of independence.

2010 July - \$8 billion debt relief deal approved by World Bank and IMF.

New electoral commission launched to prepare for 2011 elections.

2010 July - August - Mass rapes reported in North Kivu province. UN envoy Margot Wallstrom blames both rebels and army.

2010 June - August - Operation Rwenzori against Ugandan ADF-NALU rebels prompts 90,000 to flee in North Kivu province.

2010 October - UN report into killing of Hutus in DRC between 1993 and 2003 says they may constitute "crimes of genocide." It implicates Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Zimbabwe and Angola.

2010 November - UN agencies report widespread rapes during mass expulsion of illegal migrants from Angola to DRC.

UN report accuses networks within army of promoting violence in east to profit from mining, smuggling and poaching.

Ex-DRC vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba goes on trial at International Criminal Court accused of letting his troops rape and kill in Central African Republic between 2002 and 2003.

Paris Club of creditor countries scrap half of DRC's debt.

2011 January - Constitution changed, which some say boost President Kabila's election chances.

2011 February - Court sentences Lt-Col Kibibi Mutware to 20 years in jail in a mass rape case in eastern Congo. This is the first conviction of a commanding officer for rape in eastern DRC.

19 killed in coup bid against president, police say.

2011 May - Rwandan Hutu rebel Ignace Murwanashyaka goes on trial in Germany for alleged crimes against humanity in DRC.

2011 July - Col Nyiragire Kulimushi, who is accused of ordering the mass rape of women in eastern DRC, surrenders to authorities.

2011 September - Mai Mai militia leader Gideon Kyungu Mutanga escapes during a mass prison break-out by almost 1,000 inmates.

2011 November - Presidential and parliamentary elections. Mr Kabila gains another term. The vote is criticized abroad and the opposition disputes the result.

2012 July - Warlord Thomas Lubanga becomes first person convicted by the International Criminal Court since it was set up 10 years ago. He is sentenced to 14 years in jail for using child soldiers in his rebel army in 2002 and 2003.

2012 October - The UN Security Council announces its intention to impose sanctions against leaders of the M23 rebel movement and violators of the DRC arms embargo. A UN panel says Rwanda and Uganda are supplying M23 with weapons and support, which both countries deny.

2012 November - M23 troops briefly enter Goma, the main city in the resources-rich east, then withdraw on promise government will release some of their supporters.

2013 February - Representatives of 11 African countries sign an accord in Ethiopia pledging to help end the conflict in DRC. The M23 rebel group declared a ceasefire ahead of the talks.

2013 March - Warlord and alleged M23 founder Bosco Ntaganda surrenders to US embassy in Rwanda and is transferred to the International Criminal Court in The Hague to face war-crimes charges.

2013 July - 3,000-member UN Intervention Brigade deployed to fight and disarm rebels in the east.

2013 December - M23 rebel group signs peace deal with government after army captures last of strongholds in east.

Army repulses attacks on state TV, international airport and a military base in Kinshasa by supporters of self-proclaimed prophet Paul Joseph Mukungubila.

2014 February - UN accuses rival Mai Mai militias of killing more than 70 civilians in Masisi area of North Kivu, in east of country.

2014 March - International Criminal Court finds FRPI militia leader Germain Katanga guilty of war crimes over 2003 massacre of villagers in Ituri province.

2014 June - Congolese and Rwandan troops clash on the border of their two countries.

London-based oil company SOCO International announces the suspension of exploratory drilling in Virunga National Park, home to 200 endangered mountain gorillas.

2014 May - Two soldiers are convicted of rape in the trial of 39 members of the military accused of war crimes in the east. They were accused of going on the rampage while retreating after losing the city of Goma to rebels in 2012.

DRC says almost 60,000 of its citizens have been deported by Congo-Brazzaville in the past month in what is seen as an operation to evict illegal immigrants.