



# Atrocities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 1996–Present

The country now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has undergone many changes in the past 125 years. As a Belgian Colony, it was known as the Congo Free State. King Leopold of Belgium, and those he sponsored, undertook many projects in this region. Ultimately, however, millions of Congolese died as a result of disease and brutal colonial policies. The Belgian Parliament took over the colony after international pressure; and in 1960, the colony gained independence and the country's name changed to the Republic of the Congo. After a coup by Mobutu Sese Seko, the country was renamed Zaire.

After the 1994 Rwandan genocide, millions of Hutu refugees — both guilty and innocent — fled into eastern Zaire, disrupting ethnic relations in the region. The genocidaire Hutus (FDLR) allied with the army of Zaire and attacked ethnic Tutsis. A Tutsi militia group, organized with the Rwandan and Ugandan armies to fight against the Hutus, worked to seize control of the region's resources and establish a Tutsi-friendly government. This group (AFDL) was led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila. En route to the capital city of Kinshasa, Kabila's forces and the Rwandan army murdered approximately 200,000 Hutus in eastern Congo. In September 1997, Kabila declared himself president of the new Democratic Republic of the Congo.

After a year of failing to address issues that led to the 1996 war, the new Congolese army — backed by Rwanda and Uganda — rebelled, sparking a second war known as the Great War of Africa. Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia sent troops to aid Kabila. In the east, fighting had never ended; a range of armed forces continued to perpetrate violence, including forced displacement, abductions, looting, forceful recruitment and use of child soldiers, and massive sexual assaults. A ceasefire agreement was signed in 1999 by all six African nations, as well as the Movement for the Liberation of Congo and Congolese Rally for Democracy rebel groups. In 2001, Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated; his son Joseph Kabila took power. That spring, the United Nations (UN) introduced a peacekeeping mission, to oversee the ceasefire negotiated. In 2006, the DRC held its first multi-party elections since 1960, maintaining Joseph Kabila's power.

Despite the ceasefire and several peace agreements brokered by the UN and the United States over the last decade, violence continues across the DRC. Continued hostility, fed by inter-group violence, produced an environment where groups fear their existence is under threat and engage in pre-emptive attacks, resulting in a repeating cycle of violence. The conflict is complicated by a focus on gaining control of significant natural resources, including diamonds, copper, zinc and coltan. According to the UN, 27,000 sexual assaults were reported in 2006 in South Kivu Province alone. In addition, the International Rescue Committee estimates 5.4 million people have died since 1998, most from preventable diseases as a result of the collapse of infrastructure, lack of food security, displacement and destroyed health-care systems.

Despite setbacks, the International Criminal Court is working to bring perpetrators to justice. In 2006, Warlord Thomas Lubanga was accused of forcing children into active combat. In 2010, DRC former Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba was charged with letting his troops rape and kill in the Central African Republic, and Callixte Mbarushimana, the alleged executive secretary of the FDLR, was charged with five counts of crimes against humanity and six counts of war crimes. In 2011, Rwandan Hutu rebel Ignace Murwanashyaka, head of the FDLR, and his deputy Straton Musoni were charged with 26 counts of crimes against humanity and 39 counts of war crimes.

## Some Resources on This Topic

### Books:

- "Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe" by Gerard Prunier
- "Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa" by Jason Stearns
- "A Thousand Sisters: My Journey into the Worst Place on Earth to Be a Woman" by Lisa Shannon
- "The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth and Reality" by Thomas Turner

### Web sites:

- <http://www.genocideintervention.net/>
- <http://www.enoughproject.org/>
- <http://www.genocidewatch.org/>

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