



Illegitimate Debt After Decades of  
Turmoil

The Case of the  
Democratic Republic of the Congo






Campaign to Cancel Africa's Debt  
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## ***The Democratic Republic of the Congo***

Located in Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the continent's second largest country. Home to the world's second largest rainforest, the DRC is rich in terms of natural and mineral resources. Coltan, which is one of its largest exports, is a metal used in cell phones across the globe.

Despite this immense wealth, 80% of the population does not have access to safe drinking water, 70% has little or no access to healthcare, 16 million people have critical food needs, and the country has the highest infant mortality rates in Africa. **At the same time, the DRC "owes" approximately \$12 billion to the U.S. and other western nations.** Using the DRC as a case study, this piece will reveal the illegitimacy of Africa's debt, and how it is a major hurdle to achieving development. Here is a spotlight on the DRC.

		
Map	Flag	Coat of Arms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population: total 57.5 (millions, 2005)</li> <li>• Major languages: Lingala and French</li> <li>• Several ethnic groups with more than 200 languages.</li> <li>• Surface area: 2,344.9 (sq. kilometers-thousands)</li> </ul>		
<p><i>*Information below provided by Wikipedia.</i></p>		
<p><b>Pre-Colonialism</b></p>	<p><b>Colonialism (1908-1960)</b></p>	<p><b>Post Colonialism/ Cold War Era -Present</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kingdom of Kuba, Kingdom of Lunda, Kingdom of Luba, Kingdom of Muleke, Kivu, etc.</li> <li>• Rubber trees, oil, palm, and cassava were most dominant trading products.</li> <li>• The society developed tongues of the "Bantu" language variations.</li> <li>• The kingdoms attained considerable wealth, mainly from revenues generated from the area's mineral resources.</li> <li>• Civilizations began to develop rapidly, led by technological advancements in utilizing iron, copper, and ivory. Central government was based on a chieftaincy structure.</li> <li>• Berlin Conference 1885 led to the division of Africa by European colonialists. Belgium was determined to occupy the area that is present-day DRC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DRC was occupied by Belgium, and named "Belgian Congo" of the King Leopold II royal family.</li> <li>• Exploited for coltan, cobalt, gold, copper, zinc, diamonds, and many other natural &amp; mineral resources. Rubber was another major export product that helped King Leopold build his fortune.</li> <li>• During World War II, the Congolese army won many victories against the Italians in North Africa.</li> <li>• Belgian Congo was also essential in providing uranium to the west, which was used to build atomic bombs.</li> <li>• Belgian Congo won independence in 1960, and was renamed the Republic of Congo under the leadership of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1st Leader Patrice Lumumba mysteriously assassinated after less than a year in office.</li> <li>• General Mobutu Seso Seko, former chief of staff of the Congolese army, declared himself head of state after a U.S. backed coup in 1965.</li> <li>• Congo is renamed Zaire by Mobutu in 1966, in an effort to cleanse the country of its colonial legacy.</li> <li>• After decades of oppression, Mobutu is ousted and replaced by General Laurent Désiré Kabila</li> <li>• After the death of his father, Joseph Kabila was appointed President, &amp; then was elected President in 2006 in the 1st democratic elections held in the DRC.</li> </ul>

Nobel Peace  
Laureate  
Wangari Maathai  
on illegitimate  
debt at the 2007  
World Social  
Forum held in  
Nairobi, Kenya



*"Loans given to irresponsible projects or illegitimate regimes should not be the plight of the people to repay..If the illegitimate debt is to be cancelled, churches, civil society organizations and parliamentarians will need to put increased pressure on leaders in the North and the South to do so ..."*

African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD) January 2007.

## *The Illegitimacy of the DRC's Debt Burden*



Mobutu Sese Seko was one of the world's most tyrannical and corrupt leaders. His "reign of terror" drained the nation of profits generated from its numerous resources, and invested them into his personal bank accounts. Furthermore, Mobutu was granted numerous loans from international financial institutions, which created the foundation of the country's crippling debt burden today.

**Despite having the reputation of being one of Africa's most oppressive leaders, many western nations, including the United States, continued to provide immense loans to Mobutu.**

During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union granted numerous loans, weapons, and other material items to gain support for their side during this ideological battle. African leaders accepted these items, most in an attempt to rebuild as newly independent states after colonialism. **The Cold War created an environment where tyrannical leaders like Mobutu could thrive.** Mobutu was able to acquire approximately \$4 billion in wealth, even as levels of poverty steadily increased across his country.

Today, the DRC pays more to service these debts than it can afford to spend on social services. The World Health Organization has reported that for every \$1 spent on healthcare, \$4 is spent on debt repayments. The current \$12 billion debt burden is illegitimate because most of the loans were taken out by an oppressive regime, which openly plundered the country's resources. The international financial institutions including the World Bank, headquartered in Washington, DC, were fully aware that these funds were not being allocated towards development.

*WHILE THE WORLD WATCHES...In the DRC there are more than 1 million people living with HIV/AIDS. It is unacceptable that its government is forced to pay more towards servicing an illegitimate debt burden than it can spend on healthcare.*

**Because of these irresponsible lending practices, the repayment of these loans is unjust. In order for sustainable development to be possible for the DRC, especially after over a decade of brutal conflict, 100% debt cancellation without harmful conditions is urgently needed.**

## *Decades of Civil Strife*

Since the end of the Mobutu regime in the 1990's, the DRC has been home to one of Africa's most complex and long-lasting brutal conflicts. Today, at least 1,200 people die each day in the DRC as a result of violence and infectious diseases. Rebels have been supported by six neighboring countries, which have various interests in the country's overwhelming mineral and natural resources. One major element in the strife in the DRC is the flood of Hutu child soldiers who grew up in the equatorial forests after the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Women and children have been affected most by the conflict, as the most vulnerable members of society. Women and children have been recruited into proxy militias, which has decreased their access to critical social services including education and healthcare. Conflict has been one the major causes of the spread of HIV/AIDS, which has contributed to the decrease of life expectancy to only 43 years of age.



**After decades of oppression, conflict, and exploitation, the DRC is in critical need of resources to provide basic health services to its people. The U.S. government and the international community has the power to release the nation from billions of dollars of illegitimate debts that will make resources available to provide healthcare and basic services, which include clean drinking water and food.**

### *A Personal Story of the Impact of Odious Debt*

**When Professor Stanis Wembonyama became director of the main hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's second city, Lubumbashi, last year, he could not believe what he saw.**

"The hospital did not even have a single thermometer, armed robbers had set up their base in some of the buildings and there was human excrement everywhere," he told the BBC News website.

"Doctors and nurses had not been paid their salaries for five years and so they earned their living by demanding cash before treating their patients.

Three of the four sterilizing units in the operating theatre do not work and some of the spotlights above the operating tables cannot be used because the bulbs have blown and they are difficult and expensive to replace.

Nevertheless, operations are still carried out - surgeons were removing an appendix while I was there - and head surgeon Alphonsine Biema insists that patients are not in danger despite the limited resources. In the maternity unit, the main sterilizing unit is broken. Only a small one works and its rusty door is held shut with a brick. The ward has holes in the ceiling, no mattresses for the metal cots and the blankets are filthy, but this is still an improvement on how things once were."

**BBC Africa *Breathing Life into DR Congo's Sick Hospitals* Joseph Winter August 8, 2006.**

**Today, the DRC has a \$12 billion debt burden, one of the highest in the world.** Although the hospital described above was successfully revitalized with minimal external assistance, there are thousands more in need of government support. Canceling the DRC's illegitimate debt will free up resources to pay doctors and nurses, and rebuild the health sector. Join us in our Campaign to cancel the DRC's and Africa's illegitimate debt. Visit [www.africaaction.org/debt](http://www.africaaction.org/debt) for more information.