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## **Stopping the Corruption in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, often abbreviated as DRC, is located in central Africa (“The World Factbook” n.pag). DRC’s large size and border countries have created issues in the past. During the Rwandan Civil War in the early 1990s, the DRC backed the Rwandan government. The Rwandan government eventually lost the civil war, but it wasn’t before they committed atrocities such as the genocide of the minority ethnic group the Tutsis. After the civil war ended in 1994, the perpetrators of the genocide retreated to Zaire as refugees. A reformed Rwanda later invaded the DRC in 1996 in hopes of taking out the perpetrators. This led to war lasting until 2003 (“Rwandan Genocide” n.pag). Many consider the wars and refugee crisis to be the inciting incident to many issues facing the DRC today. The country is now facing sanitation issues, infectious disease, human rights violations, and their biggest hunger crisis. Many groups are working to solve these issues, however, none of these issues will ever improve without the support of a strong Congolese government.

Congolese families are often similar to other African families because they are large in size. A household generally includes an immediate family and also the extended family. Sometimes people that aren’t blood-related are part of the family. In many African nations, children are considered signs of prosperity and good fortune. For that reason, the country’s fertility rate is high, with five children born for every Congolese woman (“Background” n.pag). Many children in the DRC do not have access to primary education, mostly because of lack of schools and government enforcement (“Education” n.pag). Their diet includes 1-2 meals a day. Some common foods are legumes, potatoes, maize, and cassava. Cassava is a root vegetable that grows well in the DRC; the roots and leaves are commonly eaten. Meat is not common in the DRC because of wealth or availability. (“Congolese Food” 3). Congolese families eat less than the average American family because food is not as readily available.

DRC’s government has been historically weak and has faced corruption since becoming independent. In 1960, the DRC gained independence from Belgium and formed a semi-presidential republic. Ideally, a semi-presidential republic is headed by a president elected by the people, a prime minister appointed by the president, and parliament. Ireland, Poland, and South Korea also have a semi-presidential republic system, and are all high on the Human Development Index (HDI), so the government system is not necessarily the problem in DRC (Aggie n.pag). The issues stem from a long history of corruption of government officials. DRC’s first president was Joseph Kasavubu, who was a leader in the push for Congolese independence. Kasavubu was president for five years until he was overthrown by Mobutu Sese Seko. Mobutu led a corrupt government for 32 years. Mobutu managed to be re-elected to every term by outlawing all other political parties, thus making him the only candidate. Mobutu was notorious for corruption and embezzlement. In fact, it is estimated that he took half of the country’s \$12 billion they received in foreign aid. This led to his removal from office during the Congo War. In 1997, Laurent

Kabila became president, but struggled to rebuild the DRC after the war and was assassinated in 2001. Kabila's son, Joseph took over. Joseph Kabila was president until he agreed to step down in 2019. Kabila won elections by changing rules and rigging elections. He received criticism for corruption and mismanaging resources (Sawe n.pag). The government has been prioritizing their personal agenda over the needs of the country since the beginning of the DRC's history. The DRC needs strong leadership to bring them out of their weaknesses.

There is hope for the Congolese people though, in late 2018, Joseph Kabila agreed to step down from his position as president. This paved the way for opposition leader Félix Tshisekedi to win the election in 2018. This was the first peaceful transfer of power since the foundation of the DRC ("Violence" n.pag). Tshisekedi has now been president for one year, but his results have been mixed so far. While Tshisekedi has promised to begin reforms, they have been off to a slow start. Also, the Congolese people are becoming concerned over Tshisekedi collaborating with former president Joseph Kabila. All former presidents get to be a senator for life in DRC, so Kabila is still active in the government. In addition, many members of President Tshisekedi's cabinet were in Kabila's coalition (Welle n.pag). In order to begin progress in the DRC, Tshisekedi must restore his cabinet and not collaborate with officials that have a history with corruption. I also think that Tshisekedi should reach out to government leaders from other countries with a semi-presidential republic system. Help from either those countries directly or the United Nations can lay a foundation to begin reforms to the government in DRC.

Transforming the government could put a stop to the violence in the DRC. Violence has been high since the Rwandan refugees entered the Eastern part of the country. There are over 100 armed rebel groups terrorizing Congolese communities, and historically the government has been too weak to stop them. In 1998, the government went to war against some of the rebel groups. It dragged on until 2003, when the death toll reached roughly three million. No real progress was made, and because of the weak government, the rebel groups are still at large ("Violence" n.pag). These groups insist on staying because the country has massive deposits of gold, diamonds, cobalt, tin, tantalum, coltan, and tungsten. Tantalum, coltan, and tungsten are especially valuable now as they are used in electronic devices. These metals should be making the DRC one of the richest countries in the world, but have instead made it one of the poorest. This is because the militant groups have taken control over the mines. They illegally mine the resources, smuggle them across the border to countries that support them like Rwanda and Uganda, and sell them to tech and jewelry companies, mainly in China. The rebel groups often kidnap Congolese children, and Congolese men and women are underpaid workers in the mines. The groups' main control tactic over the workers is raping them, which is why the prevalence of HIV and AIDS is so high. In addition to overtaking the mines, these militant groups have demanded that the Congolese people pay taxes to them, causing the Congolese government to be extremely underfunded (Spector et al. n.pag). The greed from the Rwandan and Ugandan rebels has severely damaged the DRC. They have hurt the economy, wars have crumbled infrastructure, and they have committed terrible human rights violations.

In 2010, the United States passed the Dodd-Frank Act, which requires US companies to report and investigate their purchases of "conflict minerals", or ones that directly or indirectly benefit the militant groups. Other countries and international companies have followed suit. This legislation has required companies to be more aware of the products they are purchasing, and has hurt the militant groups.

Between 2013 and 2015 the amount of conflict-free exports of tungsten increased by 357% (Spector et al. n.pag). Several companies like Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Intel have done a great job transferring to conflict-free after the Dodd-Frank Act was passed. But some still purchase mostly conflict minerals. This is especially plaguing the jewelry industry. In order for the groups to further dissolve, retail companies like Macy's, Walmart, Helzberg Diamonds, and Nieman Marcus must transition to selling conflict-free products (Callaway 1). As more companies follow suit in becoming conflict-free, the rebels will lose major customers and profits. The United Nations should also enforce sanctions on Rwanda and Uganda, countries that are funding the militant groups. The sanctions should speed up the process of dissolving the militant groups, and solving the issue diplomatically will avoid the prospect of another war. Once the mines are back in the DRC's control, they can employ the Congolese people, begin collecting taxes again, and open for business in other countries. UN countries will be able to invest money in conflict-free mining companies, and bring more business back to the DRC's mines. An end to the conflicts in the DRC would open the doors for opportunities in the DRC.

Without militant groups controlling the mines, the DRC has the potential to be a very prosperous nation. However, first the DRC must work to fix the crumbling infrastructure and end the largest hunger crisis in their history. The wars that the DRC has faced have caused the infrastructure to be incredibly weak. The electrification access rate is currently only at 9% throughout the country- with 19% in urban areas and 1% in rural areas ("Power Africa" n.pag). The government has taken the issue seriously and has proposed many plans for renewable energy plants for the country. In May of 2019, the government worked with an international clean-energy company to frame a plan for a 400 megawatt solar power plant. This plant will increase the DRC's electrification access up to 65% by 2025, and more proposals for solar and hydroelectric plants have appeared as well (AfricaNews n.pag). Another issue with the infrastructure is the poor water supply. The lack of infrastructure during the wars caused the access to sanitary water to dwindle. In urban areas, water is pumped through old, rusty pipes. In rural areas, they often drink from streams or ponds full of waste and bacteria. The contaminated water causes malaria, diarrheal diseases, and malnutrition, all leading causes of death in the DRC. Nonprofits have worked to alleviate these issues in the past, but without support from the government, these efforts were impossible (Shore n.pag). But, with a stronger government no longer plagued by corruption and conflict, progress can be made. When the mines are back in the DRC's possession, the country should be able to undergo improvements to the water supply. The synthesis of nonprofits and the government will allow for major improvements to be made to the DRC's infrastructure, thus decreasing deaths from malaria, diarrheal disease, and malnutrition.

Malnutrition can also be decreased agriculturally. It is estimated that over 13 million Congolese people are malnourished. This statistic is strange considering the fact that the DRC has the potential to feed 2 billion people. The DRC has about 80 million hectares of arable land. However, only 10% of the 80 million hectares are actually cultivated ("Democratic Republic of the Congo" n.pag). Help from foreign aid would allow the DRC to begin cultivating the other 90% of the land. In 2018, the DRC received \$707 million in foreign aid from the United States alone. Of this, \$69 million is spent on food security assistance ("U.S. Foreign Aid by Country" n.pag). Most of this goes to short-term solutions like food, and while this is a necessary expense, it doesn't allow the DRC to become self-sufficient and sustainable. Some of this aid should begin going to teach the Congolese farmers about mechanized farming and

converting their arable land to farm ground so they can begin to produce more hectares in the same amount of time. President Tshisekedi has also been working on requiring public education for all Congolese children, I think that an addition of agriculture curriculum would benefit the DRC by educating the younger generation about sustainable agriculture. This transition will allow the DRC to depend on foreign aid less and decrease the number of malnourished people in the DRC.

These issues cannot be solved by nonprofits, the United Nations, or the Congolese government alone. However, when these entities collaborate, they will find that the DRC can transform into a prosperous nation. A nation that resolves conflicts, takes back the mines, produces electricity, improves their water supply, produces more agriculturally, and above all, a nation that allows their citizens to live safe, long, and healthy lives. This transformation will not be sudden, but it begins by reforming their historically corrupt government.

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