

WILL THEY, WON'T THEY?

AFRICA'S THIRD-TERM PRESIDENTS

A REPORT FROM PEACE DIRECT'S LOCAL PEACEBUILDING EXPERTS, MAY 2016

Many presidents and prime ministers in Africa are limited by law to two terms in office. But a wave of leaders are standing for a third term – with potentially violent consequences. Peace Direct's Local Peacebuilding Experts discuss the issues from across the continent.



Chadian President Idriss Déby (standing in truck, front left). Déby stood for President for the fifth time this year, having first assumed power in 1990. Image credit: [UNAMID](#).

With 54 states across the continent, there is always an election happening somewhere in Africa. But some say that the same old faces are staying in the same old places – with presidents and prime ministers accused of rigging the system, and worse, in order to stay in power. Many countries limit how long their leaders can stay in office to two consecutive terms. So the temperature has risen in recent years as some have announced their

intention to stand for a third term, not to mention those who have already spent decades in power. The issue has been hotly debated for its impact on conflict, security and development across Africa. But we wanted to hear more about the view from the ground. So we asked five of our Local Peacebuilding Experts to consult with civil society on the bottom-up consequences of top-down politics. Here's what they said.

POLITICS AND PERSONALITIES: THIRD-TERM PLAYERS IN AFRICA

Five individuals with an outsized impact on their country

Burkina Faso: Blaise Compaoré

Took power in coup: 1987. Elected: 1991, 1998, 2005. Resigned: 2014.



Blaise Compaoré was forced to step down from power in Ouagadougou following demonstrations in October 2014. He had recently tried to amend the constitution to allow him to stand for a fifth term as president. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected President of Burkina Faso in November 2015, after 12 months of transitional government. **See page 6.**

Chad: Idriss Déby

Assumed power: 1990. Elected: 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016



Assuming power as the head of the Patriotic Salvation Movement in 1990, Idriss Déby has since won five elections in Chad. Allegations of corruption and human rights abuses have dogged his time as President. **See page 7.**

Sierra Leone: Ernest Bai Koroma

Elected: 2007, 2012. Elections due 2017.



Ernest Bai Koroma was elected in 2007 as the first post-war President of Sierra Leone. The country made economic progress but the last few years have been dominated by an outbreak of the Ebola virus which killed several thousand people. The two-term limit on the Sierra Leonean Presidency means Koroma is due to step down in 2017. **See page 4.**

DR Congo: Joseph Kabila

Appointed: 2001. Elected: 2006, 2011. Elections due November 2016.



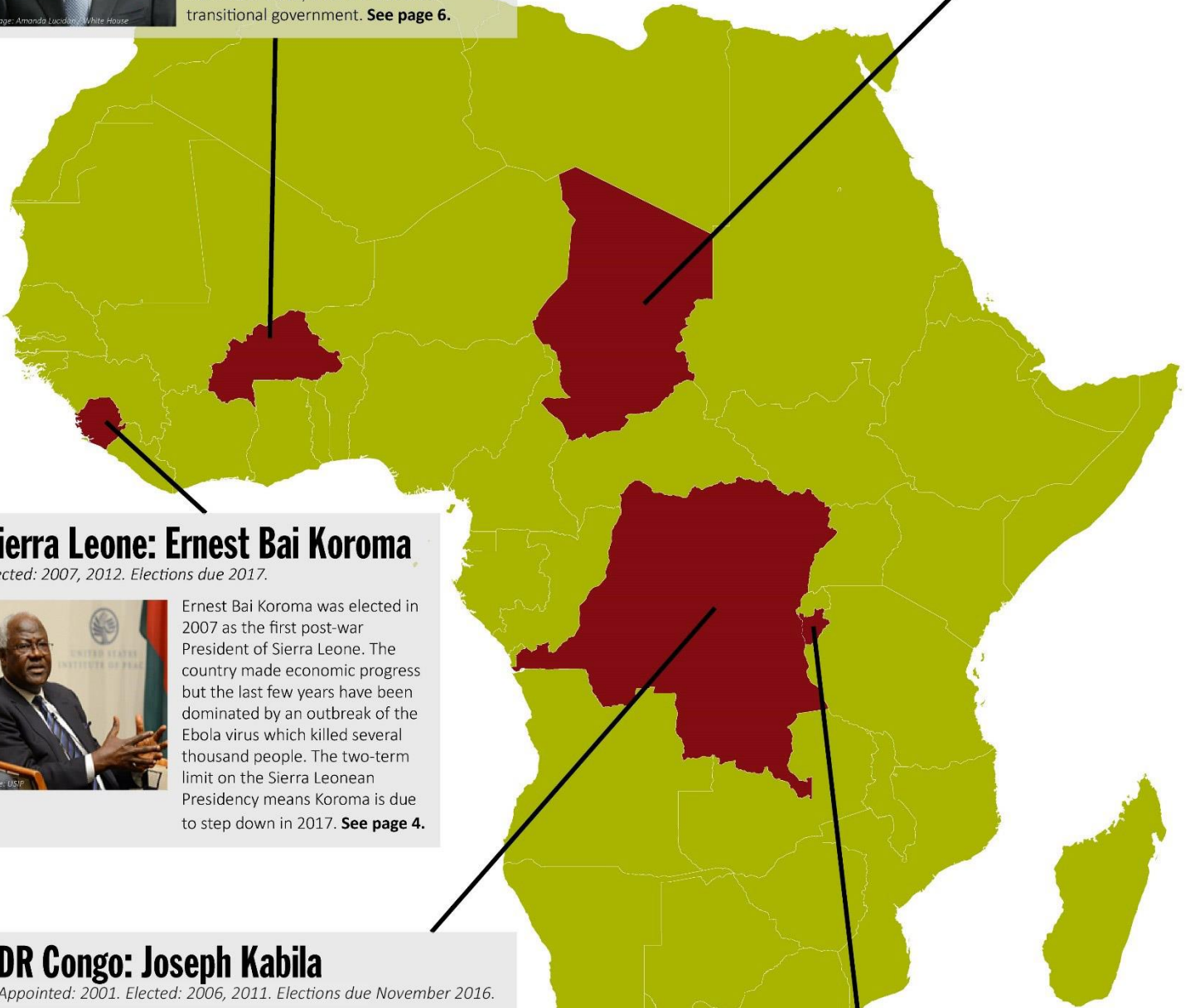
The son of assassinated former President Laurent Kabila, Joseph Kabila is a former military commander. He won the 2006 general election in DR Congo – the first since independence – and then the second in 2011. Opponents criticised constitutional changes in the run up to that election, which they said were designed to ensure his victory. **See page 9.**

Burundi: Pierre Nkurunziza

Elected: 2005, 2010, 2015.



Burundi has seen more than a year of violence since President Pierre Nkurunziza announced his decision to stand for election for a third consecutive presidential term in 2015. More than 1,000 people have been killed and 250,000 have fled abroad. A former military commander in the Burundian civil war, Nkurunziza was first elected in 2005. **See page 3.**



Burundi on the brink: crisis in central Africa

The last 12 months have seen a political storm spiral out of control in Burundi. Our Burundi Peacebuilding Expert describes a year of mounting violence.



The Burundian capital Bujumbura has seen serious violence over the last year. Photo credit: thanks to Igor Rugwiza: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/78438977@N03>

The situation in Burundi is a terrible example of what can happen when politics goes wrong. A year-long crisis has seen violence and alarming human right violations across the country, which is much worse than most people realise. The total number of fatalities is often reported as being around 450, but detailed analysis indicates that at least 1,000 have been killed. More than 250,000 people have fled the country.

Faced with this terrifying situation, a quarter of a million people have fled

Why has this happened? The immediate trigger was the decision by President Pierre Nkurunziza, who had already served two terms in office, to stand for a third term in the July 2015 elections. He had previously spent 2005-2010 and then 2010-2015 as head of state. Nkurunziza argued that because he was nominated by Parliament the first time round, it did not count. Burundi's constitutional court, allegedly under duress, agreed with him, but many others did not – and took to the streets to demonstrate.

A year of violence

The government clamped down hard on the protestors, and the situation deteriorated after a failed coup d'état in May 2015. Since then, Burundi has seen waves of violence targeting ordinary citizens and security forces across the country, not least in the capital, Bujumbura.

Residents in the so-called 'dissenting districts' – where many of last year's protestors live – have seen dozens of people disappear overnight. If they reappear at all, it is often as corpses in the streets. Many have clearly been tortured, and some have been executed. Across Burundi, hundreds are missing, and towns and villages are reeling from grenade attacks, kidnappings, and intimidation by armed groups.

Faced with this terrifying situation, and in the context of a country whose civil war ended only a decade ago, a quarter of a million people have fled to neighbouring countries, causing a refugee crisis for which the UN does not have enough money and is struggling to raise more. This is a huge number in a region which is still recovering from multiple armed conflicts.

Information blackout

In terms of civil society, it has been very difficult. Independent media were attacked in the wake of the coup attempt, with several independent radio stations burnt down. Journalists and civil society leaders have fled. Some civil society organisations working on human rights monitoring, governance and democracy have been suspended, and seen their bank accounts frozen. Such organisations, as well as trades unions and other civil society groups that are still operating inside the country, do so at serious personal and professional risk. This virtual information blackout makes it hard for Burundians to hear about what is going on in their own country, which makes it easier for politicians and other elite members of society to try and manipulate factors such as ethnicity to support their cause.

Despite warnings, Burundians are refusing to turn on each other

Fortunately, despite many outside observers warning that the situation threatens to disintegrate into ethnic or other identity-based conflict, Burundians are persistently refusing to turn on each other. This includes, in particular, the Army, whose integration across ethnic lines was one of the undoubted success stories of the Arusha Accords, the peace deal which ended the civil war. There is extremely worrying information that the Army's unity is fracturing, with targeted attacks on – and

desertion by – senior officers. But so far, the Army has held firm, and retained the trust of the Burundian people as a neutral force in politics. It is vital that this should continue.

However, the lack of information is a big problem. It is helping to polarise positions, with people either being “for” or against” Nkurunziza’s third term. And this in turn makes it very difficult to get anyone around a negotiating table, as the government has announced that it won’t engage in talks with the radical opposition part of the Conseil National pour le respect de l’Accord d’Arusha pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Burundi et de l’Etat de Droit (CNARED). This is a group which aims to uphold the Arusha Accords, but which the government calls a ‘terrorist’ organisation. With almost no negotiating space even to talk about alternative political futures for Burundi, the status quo prevails. And while that happens, people continue to die.

Where next?

But all is not lost. As mentioned, ordinary Burundians do not want this conflict – that is why so many have left. One day, they will return, and rebuild. For that to happen, someone, somehow, needs to get all parties to enter a dialogue, without preconditions or an agenda, beyond discussing all the issues linked to the crisis. The momentum for such talks has swung back and forth but no one has yet managed to get senior representatives from the government, opposition political parties, civil society and all other relevant stakeholders to be in the same place at the same time, and to stay there. Doing so would be a first step to restoring hope that Burundi can build on the progress made since the end of the war in 2005. And that’s where the regional facilitators are focusing efforts, hoping to get these talks resumed later this month.

The author is Peace Direct’s Burundi Peacebuilding Expert. Their identity has been withheld because of security concerns.

The right time for more time in Sierra Leone?

Debate on whether President Ernest Bai Koroma should stand for a third term in Sierra Leone is intensifying. Abdul Brima spoke to civil society for its view.



The outbreak of Ebola in 2014 had a big impact on Sierra Leone. Supporters of the government say that it should be given more time to complete work disrupted by the crisis. Image credit: [U. S. Institute of Peace](#).

Supporters of Sierra Leonean President Ernest Bai Koroma have mounted a campaign for an extension of his term beyond February 2018. Critics say this would violate the two-term limit imposed by the constitution.

And there is a clear split of opinion on the move for “more time,” as the debate is known in Sierra Leone, not least in civil society. One anti-more time campaigner is Edmond Abu Junior, who is the Executive Director of Native Consortium and Research Center.

“The entire more time debate is illegal and undemocratic,” he says. “It does not guarantee peace and should not be discussed. Ernest Koroma’s predecessor, the late President Kabbah, was given more time in office because the country was at war and the Constitution validated it.”

National Coordination for Civil Rights Coalition representative Alphonso Manley believes the opposite. He is pushing for an extension of term for the president.

“Democracy is moved by the wishes and aspirations of the people. We as young people are in the majority. We think that judging from the development strides undertaken by President Koroma’s administration and the 18 months disturbance of Ebola, his term should be extended.”

The Ebola justification

As Manley says, proponents of the more time campaign argue that Koroma's second term in office was hindered by the outbreak of Ebola in 2014, which killed 4,000 people in Sierra Leone. They argue that Ebola devastated the economic fabric of the country and prevented the administration from successfully implementing its development agenda. For this reason, they say, the president should be given 'more time' to compensate for the lost period.

Edmond describes this as ludicrous. "If Ebola is cited, then both Liberia and Guinea should have also called for extension of terms. But they went ahead and conducted elections despite the Ebola scourge. So what is different in Sierra Leone's context?"

I asked constitutional lawyer Solomon Jamiru what he thought about the debate. He drew my attention to Section 46 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which says "no person shall hold office as president for more than two terms of five years each, whether or not the terms are consecutive."

Some argue that the administration should be given more time to implement its agenda after Ebola

But although the constitution is clear about term limits, the more time campaigners are still hopeful. One factor is the decision by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to defer local council elections to 2018, when they were initially slated for 2017. If these are to be held in 2018 instead of 2017, then according to these campaigners, why not the Presidential election as well?

A legal precedent?

A hugely anticipated decision is the outcome of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) process. The CRC was set up two years ago by the government to review Sierra Leone's constitution and make recommendations to be validated through a referendum.

If the CRC recommends a presidential term extension – and it is endorsed – then President Koroma will legally qualify to run for a third term. However, the CRC recently released its first draft report and it dashed any hope of a presidential term extension. This was much to the dismay of the ruling All People's Congress Party.

Osman Turay lives in Freetown. "There is a lot at stake around this more time issue. Sierra Leone has been through a wave of turbulent past: the war, and most recently Ebola. We must therefore tread carefully for the sake of peace and national cohesion."

The constitution is clear about term limits, but more time campaigners are still hopeful

According to lawyer Solomon Jamiru, the Constitution does not provide for a blanket ban, with some exceptions possible: "Section 49 (2) says that war can be a precondition for the extension of a presidential term." However, there is another interesting catch. Section 1, "which has been hugely alluded to because of the interruption of the Ebola virus," also says that a state of public emergency is grounds for extending the term limit.

Edmond from the Native Consortium and Research Center say that does not matter. "The instances cited by the more time campaigners are not realistic and are not within the spirit and intent of peace and security. Wisdom should be applied in this situation, otherwise the implications for more time will be very costly."

The Government view

The president and his government have been surprisingly coy on the issue. After months of speculation, former Minister of Information and Communication, Alpha Khan, made this pronouncement on the BBC's World Service: "Calls from some sections of the country for the president to be given more time are the expression of gratitude from a grateful population who believes that President Koroma has worked hard enough."

He said that President Koroma himself has not made any public pronouncement on this issue, that the people were merely exercising their democratic rights, and that the president will listen to the wishes and aspirations of his people. Koroma's continued silence has kept many speculating. The public is waiting with bated breath.

Abdul Brima is Peace Direct's Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Expert. A radio producer and presenter on BBC Media Action Sierra Leone, he has worked with rural communities on conflict and development issues in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Who guards the guardians in Burkina Faso?

*Civil society has played a key role in Burkina Faso's transition to democracy. But independent organisations must stay independent for real change in Burkina, says **Boris Somé**.*



Burkinabés at a live public radio recording. Burkina Faso's cultural scene has contributed to a wide range of civil society organisations coming to the fore since Blaise Compaoré was removed from power. Image credit: [Guillaume Colin & Pauline Penot](#).

Burkina Faso wants to turn the page on the reign of President Blaise Compaoré. The legacy of long-term regimes is long-term crisis, and Burkina Faso is no exception. Its political history before the 1990s was a succession of coups d'état, and for 24 years from the last coup in 1990, Compaoré maintained his grip on power through unpleasant political and judicial strategies.

In order to do this, soon after taking office he started developing a culture of fear. Politically, he sought to systematically eliminate those who were likely to launch a coup against him. Some of his former 'comrades' were forced into exile, and the opposition was weakened using corruption and defamation.

Compaoré also made a series of changes to Article 37 of the Constitution, which deals with limitations on the presidential mandate, and he always managed to find a legal justification for staying in power. The last attempt at this was his insistence on trying to seek constitutional change to allow him to stay in power for a fifth term. This is what precipitated his departure from power in October 2014.

The Compaoré era was therefore without foresight or ambition, nothing more than a tropical dictatorship siphoning off of Burkina Faso's wealth. Civil society played a major role in getting rid of this system, contributing to reinforcing opposition parties through a tacit alliance in a fight against a common enemy. During

the demonstrations that led to Compaoré's resignation, there was a strong bond between the two, even though the diversity of civil society made it difficult to form a real coalition.

Burkinabé civil society: a key transitional force

The post-Compaoré transition to democracy has also been led from the ground up, and the involvement of civil society in defining the rules of the future regime has been significant. For example, it has had a strong formal presence within the Conseil National de la Transition (National Transition Council) and the Commission de la réconciliation nationale et des réformes (National Reconciliation and Reform Council).

During the transition period, civil society had played two main roles: to lay the foundations of the future regime and prepare for elections. Its determination to bring about real change led it to manage certain issues in a radical way. For example, the dissolution of the notorious Regiment de la Sécurité Présidentielle (Presidential Security Guard) was requested and achieved.

The Compaoré era was a tropical dictatorship, siphoning off Burkina Faso's wealth

More broadly, the resignation of President Blaise Compaoré launched an exceptional period of openness in political life. Civil society has often had to face up to the regime's corruption and intimidation. But after the murder of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998, groups came together to show a united front in challenging authoritarian power. And this dynamism has been useful during the transition, in activities such as election observation and civic education. Civil society has been praised both for its contribution to the advent of the transition and its positive influence during it.

However, there have been damaging setbacks. Political and civil society actors all wanted to take charge of the

transition period and everyone wants to impose their vision of post-transition Burkina Faso on the country. Civil society has seemed at times to compete with the political parties, positioning itself as the defender of republican values. By presenting itself as the guardian of the institutions and achievements of the uprising, it gave the impression of wanting to manage the transition itself, rather than remaining solely a check on power.

The resignation of Compaoré led to exceptional openness in political life

Furthermore, during the transition, the number of civil society organisations has increased, some with far-fetched names that are a reminder of their circumstantial and opportunistic nature. This has widened the split within civil society, and risked its hard-earned credibility.

The situation has given rise to the hypothesis of an 'impure civil society' divided into a sections of civil society 'in power,' 'of the opposition,' and 'of the non-

affiliated.' Politicisation and corruption are continuing risks.

Of course, this doesn't apply to everyone; the oldest organisations proved their integrity and professionalism during the Compaoré era. But although civil society has certainly influenced the direction and content of the transition for the better, it has at times also demonstrated too much zeal. This could be said to have tarnished its reputation and diminished its impact. It must regain its dignity, and it is now urgent to organise beyond advocacy work and training in order to have a truly independent civil society. Nationwide discussions should take place to restore confidence in this key transitional actor.

Boris Somé is Peace Direct's Burkina Faso Peacebuilding Expert. He has been the National Coordinator of WANEP-Burkina Faso since September 2014, where he has also worked as the manager of its National Early Warning System. Boris trains local peacebuilders and has wide experience in advocacy and research, including publishing a book on peacebuilding in Burkina Faso. He holds a Master's in Ethics and Governance from the School of Political and Moral Sciences of West Africa, in Abidjan.

Chad: the more things change, the more they stay the same

Elections have just taken place in Chad – but few expected change at the top. Bouyo Séverin discusses how President Idriss Déby has managed to stay in power for more than 25 years.



Idriss Déby (r) with his South African counterpart, Jacob Zuma. Déby has been President of Chad since 1990, and supporters say that the country needs stability to develop. But critics claim that he has manipulated state and society to stay in power. Image credit: [GovernmentZA](#).

In April 2016, Idriss Déby won a general election to ensure he would be sworn in for a fifth term as Chadian President. Few expected any other result. The political situation in Chad is characterised by a lack of good governance and fulfilment of basic rights. Protests and demonstrations are often repressed or forbidden by the security forces, and the issue of political change is a concern for the entire population. Although democracy came to Chad in 1990 and regular elections have been held since then, there has never been full transparency.

Many have been the subject of controversy, and several times an armed opposition has tried to overthrow the regime.

25 years at the top

Opinions on the man at the top of the state, Chadian President Idriss Déby, are mixed. Some see him as the embodiment of stability and development, and that it would be difficult to find anyone as charismatic. For them, Chad is not yet ready for political change, and continuity is the best option. But others see him as an impostor who erased the constitutional check on presidential term limits.

There is a crisis of confidence between rulers and ruled

With a serious terrorist threat in Chad, and many unable to meet their basic social and economic needs, this split in opinion should be understood in the context of a crisis of confidence between rulers and ruled. The question for civil society is: how can it help? And what are the challenges for political development in Chad?

Civil society views on political progress

Doumla Hibra Laurent, from the Chadian League for Human Rights, says there are many obstacles to those working for political change through elections in Chad. Some of these are built in to the system: "Administrative divisions are designed with a political and electoral purpose: to inflate the number of people in villages and townships. Second, political changes are likely to be blocked by the institutional and legal framework. The election management bodies lack credibility and impartiality. Most members of the Constitutional Council are directly or indirectly appointed by the President.

"In addition, the armed forces and public administration are politicised clan structures. Most policemen, military, administrative, traditional and traditional authorities are from the ruling party – and it is difficult for supporters of an opposition party to obtain these positions. Finally, corruption has become endemic in all sectors of socio-economic and political life."

Other civil society groups say the same thing. Céline Narmadji, from the Trop c'est Trop (Enough is enough) coalition says that expressing discontent has become risky business. "The regime has banned all public demonstrations, despite the fact that it is a constitutional right and a democratic means of expression. But because groups of disaffected people continue to protest, the

government has strengthened its repression of these events – even though they are peaceful and legitimate. This view is supported by Professor Ahmat Mahamat Hassan from the University of N'Djamena. According to him, "In Chad, justice is a repressive instrument. The Head of State combines executive, judicial, legislative and traditional power. "

Lots of parties, little politics

The ruling party has also supported the creation of many nominally independent parties, which nonetheless support it during national elections. Less able to represent itself nationally, the opposition has therefore found it difficult to present a unified candidate.

All of this means that civil society considers election-based political change to be very unlikely – which is why some have called instead for civil disobedience. In February, the Ca Suffit (That's Enough) coalition urged people to make their towns "villes mortes" – to stay at home and create "dead cities" across the country.

"In Chad, justice is a repressive instrument"

The same coalition launched a second, "citizen whistle" or "Tintamare" protest on 10 March, calling on the population to blow whistles in protest at the government's ban on protest. Further demonstrations were held on 20 March, the official start of the electoral campaign.

Conditions for a peaceful transition

Will things change? If they are to do so, then one of the keys will be to ensure the political involvement of the Chadian people. Doumla Laurent says that civil society's role is to "Ensure the population casts a protest vote, even if those in charge of the elections do not act impartially." Déby may have won again, but the campaign continues.

Bouyo Séverin is Peace Direct's Chad Peacebuilding Expert. A peacebuilder and human rights activist, he is currently working with GIZ on conflict prevention and peacebuilding projects. Bouyo has wide experience in communications, monitoring and evaluation and project management with a variety of organisations including the Chadian League for Human Rights, Management Systems International, Counterpart International and Care International. Bouyo has also worked at the UNDP and taught at the Institut Supérieur Polytechnique La Francophonie de N'Djamena.

Congolese concern: will Kabila stand?

*DR Congo President Joseph Kabila is yet to declare whether he will stand in this year's election. The uncertainty is scaring people, says **Maguy Libebele**.*



Citizens of DR Congo have seen serious armed conflict in the east of their country for two decades. Image credit: Peace Direct.

Will he stay or will he go? Six months before the end of his second constitutional mandate, the President of DRC, Joseph Kabila, is giving few signals on crucial questions which have gripped the country for months. Without any presidential declarations, his lieutenants and members of the presidential majority speak on one hand about “a peaceful change of power at the end of the mandate,” while others talk of “the inevitable delay of the elections.” Still others mention an “ardent desire to see President Joseph Kabila pursue, [for] as long as possible, his mission at the head of the country.”

For Kamande Muleba, a civil society actor from Kisangani in Eastern DRC, “The President is not obliged to make a statement on the end of his mandate. The constitution is clear on the point.”

“Kabila should be clear to calm the tension”

But this view is rejected by Hubert Sindani, a human rights defender also from Kisangani: “If President Kabila is campaigning for the peace and development of his people and his country – as he always says – he should be clear in order to calm the increasing tension.”

During a live press conference on national television in March, government spokesperson and Minister for

Communication and Media, Lambert Mende, said that “The elections will take place in accordance with the Constitution.” A declaration which caused surprise among the Congolese community. The elections, Mende added, should not “depend on dialogue” taking place.

“Arbitrary arrest, intimidation, suspensions, restrictions on freedom of expression – this is daily life”

Silence isn't golden

Olivier Kamitatu, in charge of external relations for the G7, a platform of seven Congolese political parties, previously said that “Tensions in DRC are linked to the silence of Joseph Kabila on his future. He needs to break the silence because we feel that all the institutions, which should be clearly independent and impartial, are subservient to Kabila's regime.”

“The courts, the National Independent Electoral Commission and the National Assembly are being manipulated because a single man wants to stay in power. It is against the will of the majority of Congolese, who want to see the Constitution implemented in order to guarantee the end of the second term and democratic change.”

On Radio Okapi, the civil society group “Force Vive,” from Kinshasa, asked the Congolese government and Parliament to force the Constitutional Court to make a judgement on whether or not it would be possible to organise the presidential election within the constitutional timeframe.

Dialogue planned

Civil society is more broadly lobbying Kabila's government to try and ensure the election is held within the constitutional deadline. With Kabila organising a dialogue on the subject, the organisations are aiming to prevent a scenario whereby those currently in power stay in power indefinitely. One activist said: “If the dialogue fails, the international community should take

responsibility and stop Kabila from standing as a candidate.

Another stressed that civil society should remain neutral, and “Call upon the people not to take the side of either government or opposition. Civil society groups must be vigilant and scrutinise the entire electoral process.”

This is crucial. With the entire Congolese population expecting a change, a single spark or event – linked to the current situation or not – could lead to demonstrations.

In the meantime, journalists, the political opposition and human rights defenders are worried because of the

relentless grip on their professions. “Arbitrary arrest, intimidation, suspensions, restrictions on freedom of expression – this is daily life,” said a journalist in Kinshasa.

Maguy Libebele is Peace Direct's DR Congo Peacebuilding Expert. A journalist with wide experience in the Great Lakes area, she is a correspondent for Syfia Grands Lacs, and reports in particular on women's rights issues. She has worked on peacebuilding projects around the region with the UN, national and international NGOs.

About the authors: Peace Direct has a unique network of more than 35 Local Peacebuilding Experts. They conduct research and have profiled more than 1,300 local peacebuilding organisations for www.insightonconflict, the leading online resource on local peacebuilding.

Peace Direct is an international NGO that works with local people to stop violent conflict and build sustainable peace. We support local organisations in ten countries around the world and advocate for locally led approaches to preventing conflict and building peace.

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