COUNTRY PROFILE

COUNTRY PROFILE -DRC (Democratic Republic Of The Congo)

The Congo is one of the richest nations on earth and nearly a third the size of Australia. Yet much of its wealth remains unrealised or has been plundered by other countries. Within the borders of the third-largest country in Africa are untold deposits of diamonds, oil, uranium and gold, not to mention the vast water resources represented in numerous lakes and rivers, especially the Congo River, Africa’s second-longest after the Nile.

While new signs of hope for a peaceful and prosperous future for the Congo have arisen in recent years, the country has experienced nearly 130 years of exploitation and mismanagement by a succession of poor leadership. Originally colonised in 1885 by King Leopold II of Belgium, the nation gained its independence in 1960, only to have its first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, assassinated by troops loyal to army chief Joseph Mobutu, who seized power in 1965, renaming himself Mobutu Sese Seko. The country itself has known numerous names, from the Congo Free State to the Belgian Congo, to the Republic of the Congo, to Zaire (Mobutu’s chosen name) to the current Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), to distinguish it from its northern neighbour, now called the Republic of the Congo, which was colonized by France and whose capital is Brazzaville. The two countries are also sometimes distinguished by including their capital city names and referring to them as Congo-Brazzaville or Congo-Kinshasa, Kinshasa being the capital of the DRC.

FAST FACTS

Captital City: Kinshasa,

population 8
million

Population: 69,000,000

Life
expectancy:
54.4 years

Unemployment
Rate: Unknown

Infant
Mortality:
81.21

deaths/1,000
live births

HIV &
Aids Adult Prevalence:

4.2%

Literacty: 67.2% of population

age 15 and over
who can read

and write
French, Lingala,

Kingwana, or
Tshiluba

Population
with Access to Safe

Drinking
Water: 42%

Human
Development Index:

139th out of 177 countries

Mobutu positioned himself during the Cold War as a staunch anti-communist and so earned the support of the United States, which lavished foreign aid on the Congo, much of which went into Mobutu’s Swiss bank accounts, making him one of the world’s richest people during his lifetime. After the end of the Cold War and the ascension to power of a Tutsi-led government in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide there, the Rwandan military began to make forays into eastern Congo to quell violence perpetrated by exiled Hutu militias.

Rwanda, backed by its ally Uganda, threw its support behind the rebel troops of Congolese leader Laurent Kabila, who swept Mobutu from power in 1997 and installed himself as president.

In the ensuing years, the Congo became a battleground among at least five competing African nations who sent their troops to do battle and plunder Congo’s rich natural resources: Rwanda and Uganda, initially backing Kabila but then turning against him, opposed by Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, supporting Kabila. Kabila was assassinated in 2001, with his son Joseph assuming the presidency in his place. Elections widely viewed as free and fair in 2006 returned Joseph Kabila to power.

What has become known as Africa’s World War has claimed at least 5 million lives since 1998, with unspeakable atrocities, including at least 40,000 rapes, accompanying the deadliest conflict on the planet since World War II. Thankfully the worst of the violence is now in Congo’s past. A new hope for peace has dawned even in recent months, as one of the main rebel leaders in eastern Congo, Laurent Nkunda, was arrested earlier this year in a joint operation between Congolese and Rwandan forces. This was an encouraging cooperative effort between the two former enemies.

The AE Congo Team, working with Emmanuel Kopwe, AE’s Reconciliation Ministries Director, has been investing in Congo’s hopeful future. They have brought political, business and church leaders together in numerous gatherings designed to heal wounds and trauma, foster forgiveness and effect reconciliation among a fractured

population. Thus, despite its tortured past, there is a Kingdom way forward for Congo into peace and prosperity, with AE making a significant contribution.