

Appeal by Etienne Tshisekedi to the People of Congo

ETIENNE TSHISEKEDI WA MULUMBA



THE CANDIDATE OF THE PEOPLE

My dear compatriots,

Very soon, our country will experience a great moment in its contemporary history. God willing, each of you will be involved in choosing those men and women who will preside over the governance of this great Nation.

As you know, I have decided to stand as a candidate for election to the Presidency of the Republic; not to achieve any personal ambition, but because I believe that the future of this nation cannot be indefinitely left in the hands of those who, as is widely known, are distinguished by the duplicity of their political pronouncements, their unrestrained appetite for easy money, and their total disregard of human life and the suffering of their fellow citizens.

1° So long a struggle

The peaceful struggle we are waging together to regain our dignity as human beings has seemed interminable, for it led us on a long path strewn with thorns, with pitfalls and hardships, which often caused bitterness, pain and grief.

During my long journey, I have lost friends, supporters, and ordinary simple sympathizers, whose only offence was to share this ideal of liberty and human progress.

I was also deeply moved by the loss of certain of my friends, my intimates, with whom I was not only politically involved but also related to personally. They felt that the path of moral rigor which I felt compelled to follow was perhaps not the best one. They chose different paths, making compromises that quickly became clearly compromised positions.

Others, who had also been my close companions, animated by some shadowy force, put all their energy into exploiting division and hatred between different communities of the nation, forcefully negating the ideal of change we had until then shared.

Others as well, who were not part of my political family, but with whom we had so valiantly defeated the forces debasing the status quo within the Sovereign National Conference, quickly returned to their old nature, as they realized they could not all take seats in the government which had been entrusted to me by the people united in the Sovereign National Conference.

But because we knew that the path of justice and social progress was a long and narrow path, we did not yield to the sirens of easy wealth which, very unfortunately, has led our country to its present decadence.

I certainly made errors, indeed mistakes, for which I ask for your forgiveness. And I also think of myself as having received my share of lessons and wisdom from this painful journey. But despite the extreme severity of these ordeals, my fervent commitment to defend justice and political honesty has remained firm in and season out.

2° In search of peace and reconciliation

The option of non-violence which has always inspired UDPS is justified by the fact that the

shortcut of war always breeds the seeds of wanton self-destruction. You have all experienced yesterday and again today, how quickly our politicians can undergo such a metamorphosis following the model, established during the rebellion of 1996, of easy accession to power and illegal personal enrichment.

And yet, I have often been criticized for an excessive intransigence that would not permit political reconciliation or reconstruction. I have always affirmed that my struggle has never been against one person, whoever that might be, but has been, rather, against a system where the lie is erected as truth, obscurity as light, and brute strength as law. Here I am obligated to offer you some explanatory background that should help you to understand my strong commitment to national reconciliation and openness.

At the height of the so-called war of liberation, in November 1996, I went to Cap Martin to meet with the ailing President Mobutu to obtain from him confirmation that he understood the reality of the challenges of that time, that he organize his neutralization in an honorable way, and that he permit the real forces of political opposition, which I represented, to hold negotiations with the rebels in order to avoid unnecessary deaths and the weakening of our national sovereignty. My approach has been misunderstood, if not despised and vilified.

Also remember my proposals made in March 1997 when, driven to despair by the rebel advance, President Mobutu had resolved to allow me to run the government according to the will of the people. While suggesting his neutralization as head of state, I proposed putting in place a unity government comprised equally of political opposition and rebels. I also asked that the Transitional Parliament be suspended, which, with the occupation of three quarters of the national territory by the rebels and foreign forces, clearly no longer had any political justification. There again my proposals were brushed aside by the very people to whom we wanted to offer an acceptable and orderly exit, as a prelude to reconciliation to come. They preferred to be forcefully removed several weeks later at gunpoint in the most complete and utter humiliation. Many of them were then converted in turn into pseudo liberators, leaving in their greedy path the erosion of national sovereignty, and recurrent warfare, whose dead victims number in the millions.

Also remember my visit to our brother Laurent Kabila, after he seized power by force of arms in May 1997. It seemed urgent to discuss with him, in my capacity as leader of the opposition, ways and means to be considered with a view towards legalizing and legitimizing his power, which remained arbitrary. I received a blunt refusal of service on this request and he preferred confine me to house arrest. The result was not only painful for him, but it has above all led to the collapse of the foundations of our society.

Finally I would remind you of Sun City, where all means were put in play by the parties to war to marginalize and disregard the true political opposition, of which we were without a doubt the main representatives, to the benefit of less representative individuals or stand-ins for the actual belligerents. Even so, the involvement of the real opposition helped prevent the balkanization of the Congo, in the face of attempts by two of the belligerent factions to activate an agreement, by themselves that would have led to a de facto partition of our country.

The experience of the government of transition issuing from Sun City and, moreover, the first legislature of the Third Republic, proved very clearly that we could not have taken up our position in it. Of course, this period also revealed many talented personalities in these institutions, including in the ill-fated Alliance for the Presidential Majority, who will be called on to play important roles in the Congo of tomorrow. But overall, these men and institutions have not reflected a genuine desire for peace and reconciliation, nor a desire for change, but a desire to

maintain power at any cost by trickery and crime, in order to continue to pillage with impunity and to perpetuate the loss of sovereignty.

Indeed, despite the hollow propaganda on economic improvement, poverty continues to grip nearly 8 out of 10 Congolese and the perception of social injustice has reached levels unprecedented in the history of this country. We are told all day long that the so-called 5 workshops (“cinq chantiers”) are the big news of the century that will bring salvation to the Congolese people. To be clear on this: we are not against attempts to improve the infrastructure we are witnessing now. But we denounce the opacity in the implementation, the cost and the financing of the “5 chantiers”, as well as the arrangement of priorities.

The Congolese are no longer fooled. The “5 chantiers” have become a smokescreen, or more like it, powder thrown in the eyes of the Congolese to hide the monstrous economic crimes and the blood which constitute the foundation of this regime. The AMP, which recently became the MP, forgets that the MPR, which it so aspires to resemble, had in its time, in a similar timeframe and conditions, accomplished much more in the way of infrastructure.

These two political formations, however, have never been able to give to Congolese what has been most lacking for them since the death of President Kasavubu, namely, an ethical and moral leadership based on respect for the common good, social justice and the rule of law. In addition, lacking experience and historical perspective, the AMP has broken its own constitutional commitments to decentralization, which should be the engine of sustainability of infrastructures, through adequate assuming of ownership and responsibility at the base.

Today, 14 years after its arrival, the AFDL-PPRD-AMP power in place offers us one of the most disastrous records in terms of human rights. In addition to its 5 million deaths due to various conflicts, the DRC has become a sad benchmark regarding violence against women.

Ultimately, the principal issue of this election process is to provide the Democratic Republic of Congo with a program and persons capable of : (i) asserting the authority of the state over the whole of the Republic and ensuring its territorial integrity, (ii) making a break with the anti-values that have led the country into an aggravated cycle of the perversion of the rule of law, armed conflict, murderous repression, economic predation, and generalized corruption; and, (iii) strengthening the momentum of economic growth and international cooperation on a more responsible and fair basis, with a view to accelerating human development and the well being of our populations.

3° A new era for the Congo

If we were able to overcome the weight of history by making the former colonial powers into our principal allies today, why do we not use our energy to forge such an alliance between ourselves, the daughters and sons of the same nation, so that freedom and dignity will triumph, and so that our weaknesses will no longer contribute to our enslavement.

A new era begins today for Congo, a time of grace and renewal. The hour for forgiveness has sounded. The national reconciliation and reconstruction that we desire will require from all political actors and from the entire nation a true transcendence of self. If we do not recognize our faults and do not offer our forgiveness to all who, in one way or another, have needlessly shed blood or dispossessed the poor and indigent, we will not be better than they are. Even worse, we will have failed in our responsibility before history and will be equally responsible for the continuation of national degradation.

The forgiveness that we need to offer each other should not be a naïve pardon, expecting nothing in return. To be the bearer of hope and change, it must be accompanied by the expression of an act of repentance, individual or collective, and the establishment of a new system in which the judicial robe truly replaces the gun, where arbitrariness, pillage and crime can no longer flourish. Also, the pardon should not be stripped of justice, especially for the most serious crimes which were committed in these past years, for even if pardoned, the offender cannot be held to be innocent.

If you give me your trust, I will devote myself to the realization of this desire for reconciliation by bringing together all stakeholders, including the foreign countries who are widely known for their involvement in our setbacks and in our successes, to together set up a code of conduct in a constructive spirit, tending to preserve the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the dignity of the DRC, while assuring to all full participation in the life of the nation on new foundations.

Our country is blessed with size and riches enough to allow each Congolese to find in it happiness, while respecting the law and human dignity. Similarly, with regard to economic development, since its creation more than a century ago, our country has always offered opportunities for trade with nations. It is up to us as Congolese to command respect for our dignity from other countries, and to offer in return possibilities for economic exchange in our reciprocal interests.

4 ° An indispensable electoral vigilance

Today more than ever, given the outpouring of support you have demonstrated in regard to my candidacy, I realize that these long years of collective sacrifice were not in vain; they have shaped the maturity and the political culture of the valiant Congolese people, more than ever determined to put a stop to the lying, to the trickery and to more and more elaborate falsifications, which have elected to reside at the summit of our country.

I acknowledge also the sacrifices born by partner countries and the UN, which since the establishment of the UN Mission in Congo, have sought to contribute to the construction of a more stable and more prosperous country. Beyond the economic and political interest for Africa and the world to see the DRC break with predatory management which destroys freedoms, we would like to see the effort of our partners constitute a real act of humanism and solidarity of the kind that I believe in. We also want credible elections that honor the sacrifices of western taxpayers and the memory of the Congolese martyrs.

However, while you have been numerous in demonstrating your support for my candidacy, many doubts have been expressed here and there about the transparency, the credibility and, above all, the fairness of the electoral process. How can doubt be avoided when one is witnessing the shameless use of funds of the Congolese people by actors and candidates of the PPRD/AMP power in place, which claim to make various donations to abused and despoiled populations. They monopolize the state media and campaign with impunity while denying opposition open access to public resources. This is not our first experience of denial of democracy by the PPRD/AMP power in place.

The Congolese still remember the trauma of the election of many provincial governments, truncated by corruption and intimidation, in the face of which legitimate popular contestations were repressed in a bloody barbarism. Having no other objective than to cling to power at any cost,

they have unilaterally decided to change the rules of the democratic process that they themselves had put in place, and to do this within a few months time of the elections.

Finally, I strongly appeal to all democratic forces for change and social progress, national and international, beyond political or ideological divisions, to unite their energies and resources around my candidacy, to block the road to imposture, by a great popular mobilization and a vigilance by all together in the conduct of the upcoming elections. This is the place to renew my appeal to every Congolese, to feel personally concerned, in assuring that her or his vote will actually be counted, and to block any attempt to cheat, wherever it comes from, on election day.

5 Our action tomorrow

I have asked you to give me your support. I am aware of the magnitude of the challenges and the task which awaits us on the political, security, economic and social fronts. With the help of God, who has constantly sustained and protected me during my long struggle, I'll consecrate myself to restore hope and confidence between ourselves and with the outside world.

On the political and governance fronts, I make a firm commitment to govern with all the political forces that have made the choice of change-over in political power by supporting my candidacy. In addition, I will open space to all current political forces that renounce deception, opportunism and crime, and join our project for peace, reconciliation, consolidation of democracy, and the fight against corruption.

I will create an environment where only truly devoted and involved individuals will have the privilege of engaging in the management of public affairs, where the space of public policy will cease to be a haven for opportunists, criminals and political vagabonds of all kinds.

As regards the economic and social arena, I will favor the creation of a new climate, conducive to creativity and emulation, capable of attracting and retaining large new investors, and putting Congolese back to work, thanks to permanently restored confidence and a significantly improved business climate.

I will open new prospects for cooperation and exchange with our principal bilateral and multilateral partners, to enable economic growth which will generate jobs and an accelerated human development in favor of our populations. I will deepen our brotherly and reciprocal relations with our neighbor countries, with whom we are fated by geography, history and sociology, to have truly fraternal, peaceful, responsible and constructive relationships. My vision as concerns our relations with these countries is to replace relations of mistrust and conflict with deep and durable shared economic interests, through existing frameworks of integration.

For the peace and human development of our populations, Africa has a duty to show that it is equal to the current challenges of our history, as Europe and other parts of the world have been able to do before us.

My program for the coming five years, elaborated by the Union for Democracy and Social Progress, and the other members of the platform which supports my candidacy, is developed in the document ***proposals for change in Congo***. I invite you to you make it your own. Together we will achieve it, in openness and constructive dialogue.

The Congo will be what the Congolese people want it to be. I appeal to the conscience and to the

sense of responsibility of all. We have a common destiny. The time has come to carry our common good, the DRC, towards new horizons; horizons of justice and peace, liberty and prosperity. We owe it to Providence, to our children and to future generations.

May each Congolese give its best to Congo, when it will become big and strong, it will pay us back several times!

My dear friends,

Share my message around you, in your families, your cells, your neighborhoods and villages ... Be at peace and do not yield to provocation. I am organizing myself to come and meet as many of you as possible throughout the whole country. As you know, our means are limited. But thanks to each among you and your voluntary participation, our strength is the greatest. And I know I can count on your commitment to change and your determination to win, to make a difference.

May God bless our Nation.

Kinshasa September 1, 2011.

Etienne TSHISEKEDI
