

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING-GROUP  
XXXX MEETING**

**Rome ~ 17-18 February 2000**

**REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (BRAZZAVILLE)**

**Background, Issues and Constraints**

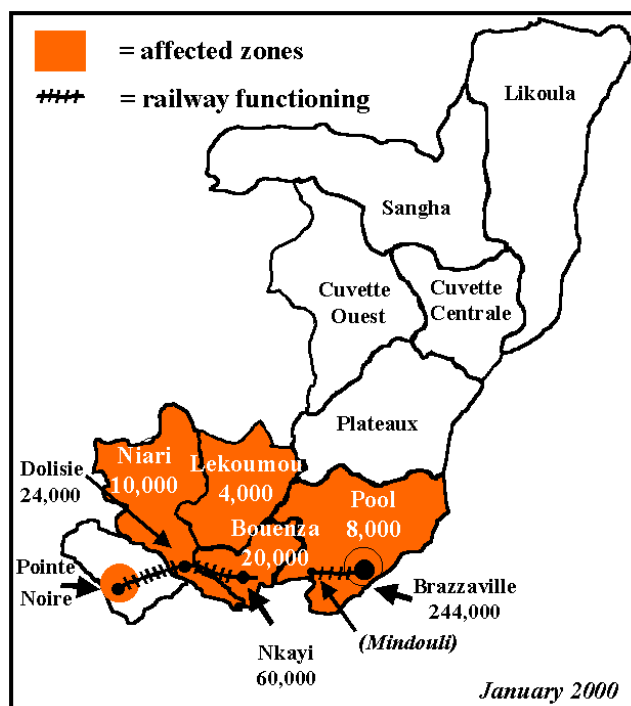
**Background:**

1. Displacement in 1999: A total of 810,000 persons (or 30% of total population) was displaced during 1999, of which only 100,000 were reached with humanitarian assistance during their displacement. In addition, those arriving in Brazzaville, mainly after August 1999, were screened and given nutritional and medical assistance. However, the whole of the affected interior of the country (the regions of Pool, Bouenza, Niari and Lekoumou), where most displaced remained, was out of bounds for security reasons and tens of thousands died of malnutrition and related diseases.

2. A 'cessation of hostilities' accord was signed in Pointe Noire on 16 November 1999 among military representatives of some of the parties to the armed conflict in the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville). The text paid promising attention to the plight of the displaced population, mentioning them in the preamble and agreeing to creation of a sub-commission responsible for ensuring their reintegration.

3. A second 'cease fire and cessation of hostilities accord' was signed in Brazzaville, 29 December 1999, building on the first accord. Five representatives of *'resistance forces'* signed in a ceremony in the parliamentary building attended by President Bongo of Gabon, President Sassou-Nguesso, ministers, representatives of the diplomatic community including the United Nations Resident Coordinator and several members of the UN Country Team, and National Transition Council members.

Map  
**370,000 persons returned by early January**



4. Opposition leaders cautiously supportive: Former Presidents Lissouba and Yombi have accepted Pres. Bongo as mediator of a process of dialogue aimed at a peaceful transition, while opposition leader Bernard Kolelas, a former Brazzaville mayor (and briefly Prime Minister under Pres. Lissouba), has also recognised Dennis Sassou-Nguesso as President and spoken in support of the cease-fire and a subsequent peaceful transition process based on dialogue.
5. Fighting stops and demobilisation advances: While there are many questions yet unanswered about the eventual shape of a re-established democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, the overall direction of the recent evolution is positive and rapid. The national army has suspended all offensive action as promised in the accords, with no reports of battles during January 2000. The army is coaxing opposition militia members to disarm and thousands (though not yet all) have done so - leaving their arms and walking into towns and villages to be received.

#### **Issues:**

6. Population returning: Although many are still suffering greatly, the humanitarian situation is improving today. The decline in military activity and news of the accords have encouraged population return to continue, relieving some of the worst pressures for those previously unable to move towards food or any basic services that may exist. An estimated 370,000 persons had returned by early January 2000, with another 410,000 still displaced. Population movement continues with numbers of returned persons as high as 600,000 foreseen by April or May 2000. Some zones still remain out of reach for security reasons, and the condition of their populations - including many displaced persons - is dire.
7. Humanitarian access is expanding, despite limited capacity to do so, with 4 out of the 5 main population centres in the interior of Pool region now reached along with a number of other points in Bouenza, Niari and Lekoumou. Indeed, security constraints are giving way in importance to logistical and capacity constraints. In the past as much as 40% of the returning population arrived severely malnourished and this has improved somewhat to 25%. Humanitarian access, though still very difficult, is becoming more possible and is creating huge opportunities to deliver diverse assistance to a population that was largely unreached during 1999.
8. Expanding assistance: International donors, United Nations agencies and NGOs alike need to rapidly expand humanitarian assistance - and diversify their activities beyond strictly emergency relief. The extension of international assistance aimed at assisting the transition, accompanied by frank dialogue on such issues as human rights, democracy and inclusiveness, would help to encourage the development of a sustainable peace.
9. Community rehabilitation: Massive population return calls for support to community level reintegration and rehabilitation of basic social infrastructure such as schools and clinics. The displaced are often returning to towns and villages that were left gutted and empty during all of 1999. There are few or no social services or economic activities in

many such places, sometimes making the decision to return a difficult one - even faced with remaining in the forest.

10. Reintegration of the now disarming ex-militia of the opposition is another top priority. Indeed, the demobilisation process itself may eventually call for assistance as the recently disarmed can find themselves welcomed in a site in town, but without adequate food, clothing or shelter. Under the accords, the more fit among the demobilised are to be integrated into the army, while the rest are to be assisted to return to civilian life. Several agencies or donors are planning or starting activities to assist reintegration into civilian life, but a greater effort will be needed if such youths are to be fully reintegrated into civilian life.
11. OCHA's role in supporting coordination will be particularly demanding and critical for the year 2000 as:
  - a) growing agency assistance increases coordination needs;
  - b) access to the interior opens up, spreading out the humanitarian community with all the consequent capacity, communication and other logistical problems; and
  - c) as the types of activities needed greatly diversify. Expansion of UN agencies and OCHA's capacity is underway.
12. The importance of development and political activities will also grow during the year 2000. Programme development is underway in such areas as strengthening of the justice system, and support for the promotion of respect for human rights. Questions such as a pre-electoral census have also been raised by the Government, and a new constitution will soon be needed. Support for the transition process may also be needed as it takes shape.
13. A chance for peace: The people of the Republic of the Congo do not feel that war in their country is chronic. The present cease-fire and expected transition have a chance of becoming one of the '*peace stories*' of the year 2000 (*the international year of the culture of peace*) particularly if the international community is able to respond to the rapidly evolving situation. Individual agencies are the key of course - whether of a humanitarian or development nature, or both - acting quickly and to the best of their abilities. The rewards of such a timely effort together could be great.

#### **Constraints:**

- Funding: Response to the Consolidated Appeal of 1999 was very low - only \$1.2m apart from food. With opening humanitarian access, the potential to actually meet needs will be greater than in 1999 thus the funding '*gap*' threatens to be greater. Needs in the mid-Year 2000 revision of the Appeal should be dramatically increased.

- Access: The drive to expand humanitarian access, previously blocked by security constraints, is now more limited by factors such as numbers of staff, appropriate vehicles, bridge repairs, communications and aid supplies in - country. Greater capacity is needed to take even modest advantage of the opportunities to meet especially extreme humanitarian needs. Some areas are still unreachable for security reasons; should they soon become potentially accessible as well, the strain on the international community's resources will further increase.
  
- Capacity: More implementing partners such as international NGOs will be needed in 2000 than were present in 1999 (*as this was a period of confinement of humanitarian assistance to Brazzaville, Pointe Noire and several refugee camps northward.*)
  
- Need for quick diversification of activities beyond immediate relief (*to ensure that no relief/development 'gap' opens up.*) The pace of events in Republic of the Congo is unusually rapid and new needs are emerging very quickly - for reintegration, rehabilitation, reintegration of ex-combatants, support to the justice system, human rights, possible elections and many more areas.

County Team ~ Republic of the Congo  
2 February 2000