

WHY THE DRC MATTERS?

A successful transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) offers more to Africa as a whole, than success in any other African conflict zone:

- ❑ Not only is the DRC five times larger than Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire combined, with twice their collective population, but it touches on nine different neighbors.

The DRC is one of the world's largest living tragedies:

- ❑ An estimated 3.5 million people died since 1998, mostly as indirect casualties of war.
- ❑ There are 3.4 million internally displaced (one million children among them) and hundreds of thousands of refugees across the borders on the territory of all of the DRC neighbors.
- ❑ Half of the estimated 55 million Congolese are under the age of 18. Children are particularly affected by the crisis: one out of five does not reach the age of five; 38 per cent suffer from malnutrition (20 per cent severely); 50 per cent between 6 and 11 do not attend school, some 9.3 per cent are believed to have lost one or both parents to the AIDS pandemic; countless thousands of other children have been recruited in armed groups or have been victims of grievous human rights abuses including killing and rape.

The most expensive peace is a better deal than the most bargain-basement war.

- ❑ MONUC, for example, has the largest budget of any of the over fifteen UN peacekeeping missions around the globe, absorbing roughly US\$ 650 million in the global peacekeeping budget of US\$ 2.8 billion a year.
- ❑ If put in perspective, UN peacekeeping has cost US\$ 31.5 billion since its inception in 1948, while yearly military expenditures worldwide are estimated at US\$ 839 billion!

The DRC has made remarkable progress...

- ❑ All of the transitional institutions have been established – including a government of national unity mostly composed of former belligerent parties; a two-chamber parliament more representative of the society at large; and five citizen commissions including an independent Electoral Commission.
- ❑ The macro-economic framework has recovered; inflation rates are down from 630 per cent in 2000 to less than 3% in the first quarter of 2004; the Congo River has reopened.
- ❑ Eighty per cent of the DRC's US\$ 14 billion external debt has been forgiven and donors have pledged US\$ 4 billion.

...but much remains to be done before free and fair elections in 2005:

- ❑ Passage of key legislation to hold elections and a referendum on a new constitution.
- ❑ Creating a new police and army while demobilizing large numbers of domestic combatants.
- ❑ Extension of state authority.
- ❑ Taking action against remaining foreign armed groups in the East.

To this end, the international community must stay the course to:

- ❑ Continue engaging key Congolese interlocutors in partnership relations in which respective responsibilities and contributions of each are clearly stated and agreed on.
- ❑ Assist in the normalization of relations between the DRC and its neighbors, with implementation of border joint verification mechanisms and other confidence-building measures.
- ❑ Sustain the credibility of the Transition – in the eyes of the Congolese population and the international community.

The DRC's is of vital strategic importance:

- ❑ Its size (2.5 million sq km), the fact that it is endowed with 50 per cent of Africa's forests and is home to one of the world's mightiest river systems – that could provide hydro-electric power to the entire continent – make the DRC the natural political center of gravity for Central Africa. No stability in Central Africa without a stable DRC, and conversely.

The DRC is one of Africa's potential economic powerhouses:

- ❑ The Central African copper belt – which runs through the DRC - contains one third of the world's reserves of cobalt and one tenth of its copper reserves.
- ❑ The DRC contains 80 per cent of world reserves of columbite-tantalite (coltan).
- ❑ It ranks among the world's largest producers of industrial diamonds.
- ❑ Substantial gold deposits are found in the eastern part of the country.
- ❑ Of the thirty-five per cent of its soil (80 million hectares) deemed exploitable, only ten million hectares are used.
- ❑ It ranks 167th out of 175 in the 2003 UNDP Human Development Report.
- ❑ If the DRC succeeds in building a stable state structure, it will attract the trade and investment for an open and lawful economy on the scale concomitant with immense untapped natural resources.