

Onéssha Afrika interviews the Congolese president Félix Tshisekedi

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Victor – Onéssha Afrika: Mr. President, thank you for your first Onéssha Afrika magazine interview. You became the Democratic Republic President on January 24, 2019. Three years later, what is your role?

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The world's largest natural park, Virunga, captures carbon and protects the climate thanks to its forest biodiversity.”

*Félix Tshisekedi, President of
the Democratic Republic of
the Congo*

Félix Tshisekedi: First, thank you and best wishes to this excellent Congolese publication. Since becoming Head of State, my contacts here and abroad have given me a lot of experience. I spent a lot of time understanding why my country had fallen so low, even though it had numerous assets in many areas that could make it the world's leader. I've been fighting this country's scourges all along. Poverty, insecurity, and corruption—the basis of all evil—are my concerns. I continue to work on this by creating the required policies. With the current government, we have accomplished numerous goals. We have completed many

projects and parameters, and I believe we are putting the Congo back on track, the proper route, and will achieve sustainable development by 2030.

Onéssha Afrika: The DRC is huge and has many issues. Easy? Possible?

Félix Tshisekedi: It's hard. It is possible with will, determination, and commitment, because when I took over the country, I noticed that obviously because of all the crises and difficulties, the Congolese did not believe in their country, especially in a fringe of the population that I estimate to be the most buoyant, the youth. When I got here, our youth was desperate. Looking at education conditions, there was no guaranteed path out of their studies. There is no social support—family or societal—so there is a lot to do on that side. Our policy is bringing patriotism back. See the nationalism. Due to widespread despondency, this was no longer observed in this country. As I stated, we're restoring our country's image today. I only ask that Congolese everywhere believe in their nation. God gave this nation. We must guide it to continental and world leadership.

Onéssha Afrika: Eastern insecurity is the biggest challenge. Explain this issue. Who are the protagonists? How will the crisis end?

Félix Tshisekedi: Since 1994, when the Rwandan genocide occurred, it has been an issue. Zaire

welcomed victims, refugees, and genocide survivors at the international community's request. The genocidaires, who were killed in Kigali battle, were refugees. They attacked Rwanda after organizing here. Rwanda implicitly gained the right to pursue. Marshal Mobutu's regime collapsed. Another regime installed with Rwanda and Uganda's support and complicity allowed these intrusions and pursuit inside the republic. And when later the relations they had already controlled some parts of the republic, some political personalities as well, and this made that they created rebellions that occupied the East of the country in its great whole, therefore the East and the North, and these rebellions provoked obviously local resistances by the formation of armed groups and one in the other and created an endless insecurity. These armed groups have formed according to affiliations and generated a glaring insecurity today. These mineral-rich locations also have illegal mineral exploitation. When you add unlawful exploitation, you see there is all forms of trafficking, including arms, mineral, human, and agricultural items. It's lawless. In the meantime, the neighbors understood that there was something to profit from, therefore they sought to keep this insecurity as a buffer zone between their country and the DRC and a fertile field for their criminal exploitation of our natural resources. Thus, our situation. We led this country with this terrible observation. I went to see all our neighbors, there are only nine of them, to tell them, "I want peace in my country, I want development, I have come to propose to you, since we will be neighbors in any case for life, to make partnerships, to improve our diplomatic relations, to go on development projects, projects of construction of infrastructure between our countries, cultural exchanges and others that would make us increase the wealth for our co-existence." Rwanda has feigned to hear me. Because three years later, it endorsed a decade-old armed group. It supported destabilizing the DRC and perpetuating unrest.



Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Onéscha Afrika: Mr. President, you've identified the protagonists?

Félix Tshisekedi: The protagonists and causes are known. We're talking about a twenty-year-old social trend. Generations. Imagine young Congolese born into this circumstances. They see no other model for a nation or civilization. It's hard because you have to address the methods, practices, rapes, brutality, trafficking,... So you have to address it and the mentalities because there are people who don't have feelings anymore and were bred in violence and think violence is acceptable. This is a long-term project, and I think we should start by strengthening and organizing our defense forces and security. Then we will establish or reinstate the authority of the State in all these areas because there must be justice, authorities, and a police force to protect the communities, and from that moment on there will be a republican order that will

force people to either follow it or be arrested, condemned, and put on the bench of society.

Onéscha Afrika: Is this your crisis resolution?

Félix Tshisekedi: Of course.

Onéscha Afrika: Mr. President, you have just launched a massive project to develop the 145 territories, an ambitious project to build the DRC from the base, which might mark a decisive turning point in your presidency?

Félix Tshisekedi: I prioritize my country over my mandate. Congolese will decide the mandate. But the first idea, as I told you, is to develop this country, which has a lot of assets, and I started from the principle that if we start with the 145 territories that make up our country, which today are in a deplorable situation, lamentable of social and infrastructural degradation and many other things, we will start by building or remaking these territories by establishing, as I tell you here, the authority of the State, therefore by building offices. Then we will supply each region with a road brigade to maintain these roads and an agricultural brigade to build an agricultural activity that will not only provide jobs but also battle hunger. Stop the exodus to overcrowded cities. 40 years ago, Kinshasa had 5 million people. However, the urbanization plan did not follow and we are almost at 15 million people. We can see that people are constructing wherever without an urbanization plan, causing floods, landslides, erosion, and problems with drinking water addiction, electrical distribution, and more because the cities were not equipped for so many people. This is to show Congolese that well-being and joy of living are not exclusive to cities. We can thrive in rural areas, our territory, and our villages. I forgot to emphasize that in each territory we will supply water and electricity, build houses, camps, and lodging to allow even those who have lived abroad and been trained overseas to come back and say that we will live in our territory because we have all the fundamental needs to produce the greatest. I'm passionate about these plans. Some areas have started. I'll launch them soon and show Congolese folks what's been done and what's coming. So it's a long-term plan that will finally raise the Congo.

Onéscha Afrika: Can you finish it on time? Given its 1.9 billion dollar budget.

Félix Tshisekedi: Money is irrelevant. Thankfully, it has drawn international attention. The World Bank and other foreign institutions are eager to join us on this endeavor. God owns time. I don't calculate my country's achievements by time because I don't seek glory. I want to repair the DRC's image and restore the Congolese people's confidence, love, and dignity.

Onéscha Afrika: Mr. President, you just attended the UN General Assembly at a time when the US-US relationship is in trouble. What did you think of the Assembly and what does the DRC think about this reshaping?

Félix Tshisekedi: I attended this Assembly to stigmatize the Russia-Ukraine war, which has affected Africa. We suffered economically. It also called for a stop to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Also, climatic change. Africa, the least polluted continent, is suffering the most from global warming. It was also a platform to plead for our continent and emphasize that polluting countries had promised to spend more resources to help climate change victims. The petition was also made on behalf of Africa in general, as these Islamic terrorist groups that emerged after

the Gaddafi war threaten Africa's stability. The West, which started this conflict, is responsible. This is our duty to help Africans escape. I ended with the DRC's misfortune. In the interview, I mentioned Rwanda's violence against us. I blasted it from the UN podium to explain that if the civilized, western, or contemporary world condemns Russia's aggression against Ukraine, we live the same schema with Rwanda, which, under the cover of the group M23, also aggresses the DRC. Why do we denounce Russia yet engage with your aggressors without contaminating Rwanda? I addressed this injustice at the UN.

Onésa Afrika: Exploitation of the 27 oil and gas blocks worries some. How do you see the situation and how will you satisfy all sides, environmentalists, and economists?

Félix Tshisekedi.: 33 altogether. First, no international convention, measure, or agreement prevents us from developing our resources. As I indicated, climate change, caused by global warming, threatens agriculture and populations. It's true, but exploiting Congo's natural resources won't worsen the situation. Today, with the problems in Ukraine, we have seen that nations like Germany, France, and others that had suspended exploitation of their fossil resources have resumed coal and nuclear energy production, reopening sites that had been closed to suit their energy needs. In the DRC, I spoke of poverty, development challenges, and insecurity, all of which require resources. We won't ask for them forever while we have them. Like every autonomous nation, we wanted to enjoy our resources. Of course, the Congo has many assets, including its ability to solve climate change, but part of its natural reserves are in protected areas. The world's largest natural park, Virunga, captures carbon and protects the climate thanks to its forest biodiversity. This implies we shall not utilize Virunga Park resources without first assessing their environmental impact. If tomorrow's environmental experts indicate that using Virunga Park's resources will harm the ecosystem, we'll halt. 33 gas and oil deposits. Only 6 are afflicted by their problem. The other 27 are unrestricted. As a country with environmental issues, Congo will not waste its assets since it seeks money and to exploit its deposits. But I would like to raise the world community's attention to the absurdity of preventing us to seek the well-being and improvement of our communities while the Virunga Park is occupied and destroyed under the guise of environmental issues. Armed gangs are endangering this world heritage, which the world envies us for guarding. Armed groups live there, deforest, harm wildlife and plants, and harvest wood for shelter and heating. Today, demographics has led to entire populations, the exponential number of populations, residing on the fringes of this park, exploiting the wood, so Virunga Park is slowly dying. For all DRC protected areas. We merely request the tools to give these folks with alternative means to stop deforestation and protect our forests with them. Certain resources will also help our military and security forces terminate the armed group activism in these areas.

Onésa Afrika: 2023 general elections. Can you organize them by the constitutional deadline?

Félix Tshisekedi: This organization has received almost \$400 million. Apart from insecurity, I don't see any issues that could block elections.

Onésa Afrika: Could you succeed?

Félix Tshisekedi: I guess I announced it. I run. I'm trying to right this country, restore its pride, and

ensure its development. One phrase isn't enough. Because I desire a second term, we will present the mid-term review. The Congolese will then decide if the work is hopeful. They'll decide whether to trust me again.

Onéssha Afrika: Last word?

Félix Tshisekedi: The last word is to remind our fellow citizens to defend the nation. I think the M23 adventure should teach us about our weaknesses and that we are a country with so much promise that our neighbors and even more distant powers envy us. Thus, every Congolese must fight for their nation. Our country needs all our hands and knowledge to position it so it can evolve in peace without conflict or destabilization. This definitely needs a patriotic leap above our political convictions, ethnic, religious, or other ties, since we are children of the same homeland, the DRC, which transcends all other considerations. Let's love and create the Congo together.

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