DRC Moves into First Place in U.S. AGOA and GSP Import Ranking at Mid-Year 2026

Historic trade milestone reflects President Tshisekedi 's results-driven transactional leadership and the coordinated implementation of AGOA under H.E. Paluku

President Felix Tshisekedi and Minister Julien Paluku

HUNTERSVILLLE, NC, UNITED STATES, August 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Democratic Republic of the Congo has moved into first place among AGOA-eligible African countries in the January–June 2026 U.S. ranking of import suppliers under the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Generalized System of Preferences, according to the AGOA.info trade data (https://agoa.info/data.html) cited for this announcement.

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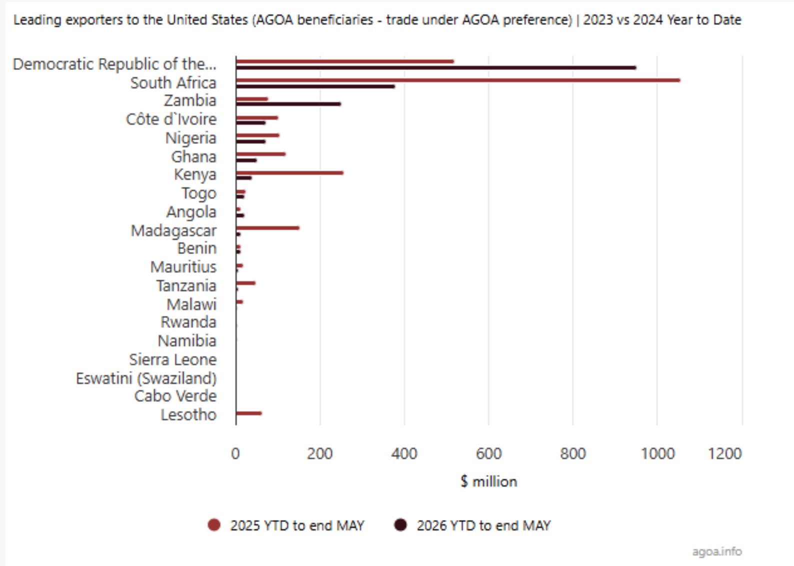
> *H.E. Minister Julien Paluku*

The mid-year ranking represents a major advancement for the DRC in its commercial relations with the United States. The official U.S. International Trade Commission reporting category covers imports under AGOA and GSP, with the latest available trade data running through June 2026.

The scale of the DRC’s broader export performance is also evident in U.S. Census Bureau figures (https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c7660.html). Total U.S. merchandise imports from the DRC reached approximately US$1.411 billion during the first six months of 2026, compared with approximately US$1.017 billion during the corresponding period of 2025. This represents year-on-year growth of approximately 38.7 percent. These figures cover total merchandise trade and are presented as broader context; they should not be described as the value of AGOA-only exports.

A Dividend of Results-Oriented Leadership

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo regards this advancement as a concrete dividend of the “transactional leadership” of President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo—a results-oriented approach to international engagement that seeks to convert diplomacy and strategic partnerships into measurable trade, investment, industrialization and employment outcomes for the Congolese people.



Leading exporters to the United States (AGOA beneficiaries - trade under AGOA preference) | 2023 vs 2024 Year to Date

Under this approach, access to international partners and markets is not treated as an end in itself. It must be transformed into actual transactions, greater demand for Congolese products, expanded opportunities for national enterprises and increased value creation within the DRC.

President Tshisekedi continues to place economic transformation, industrial partnerships and the promotion of Congolese products at the center of the country’s international engagement.

This achievement demonstrates the meaning of transactional leadership: diplomacy that delivers measurable economic results for Congo DRC. H.E. Julien Paluku explained that "President Tshisekedi's objective is to transform strategic partnerships into markets for Congolese products, productive investment, local processing, employment and greater prosperity for our people.”

Coordinated Execution Under H.E. Julien Paluku Kahongya

The Government also recognizes the sustained coordination of the DRC’s AGOA agenda through the Ministry of External Trade under H.E. Julien Paluku Kahongya, Minister of External Trade.

Under Minister Paluku’s leadership, the Ministry has worked to move the DRC from the simple possession of preferential market access toward the effective commercial use of that access. This has included mobilizing Congolese producers and exporters, promoting compliance with international standards and certification requirements, strengthening public-private coordination and supporting the diversification of the country’s export base.

The DRC’s national AGOA strategy identifies 26 priority value chains—21 non-mineral and five mineral—covering agricultural and agro-industrial products, textiles, leather products, fish and meat, as well as minerals and metals including copper, cobalt, gold, diamonds and the 3Ts.

The Ministry has also advanced work on sanitary and phytosanitary standards, technical barriers to trade and Codex Alimentarius structures. These initiatives are intended to protect Congolese exports, ensure that locally produced goods comply with international requirements and improve their competitiveness in global markets.

H.E. Julien Paluku Kahongya affirmed that “reaching first place is a historic achievement, but it is not our final destination. Our responsibility is to consolidate this position by helping Congolese producers satisfy international standards, obtain the necessary certifications, increase production volumes, and build reliable relationships with American buyers. We must now transform preferential access into sustainable transactions, value addition, and jobs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

From Preferential Access to Sustainable Export Capacity

The DRC’s emergence at the top of the mid-year ranking demonstrates the potential of coordinated economic diplomacy. It also reinforces the need to build the domestic capabilities required to sustain this performance over the long term.

The next phase of the Government’s export agenda will concentrate on:
1) Expanding exports beyond minerals into agriculture, agro-processing, textiles, leather and other manufactured products;
2) Increasing local processing and value addition before Congolese products leave the country;
3) Strengthening quality control, traceability, packaging, certification and conformity with U.S. market requirements;
4) Improving access to trade finance and export information for Congolese enterprises;
5) Connecting small and medium-sized enterprises, women entrepreneurs and young producers to international value chains; and
6) Strengthening transport, border and logistics systems to reduce the cost and time required to move Congolese products to global markets.

Minister Paluku has previously called upon Congolese economic operators—particularly those in agriculture and agro-industry—to use the opportunities available in the American market. Priority products identified by the Government include cocoa, coffee, palm oil and other agricultural and manufactured products.

A National Call to Production and Export

The Government calls upon Congolese producers, cooperatives, processors, exporters, financial institutions and members of the diaspora to build on this historic momentum.

The mid-year result confirms that the DRC possesses both the resources and the commercial potential to become a major supplier to the United States. Sustaining that position will require greater production, consistent quality, internationally recognized certification, dependable volumes, and stronger commercial relationships between Congolese businesses and American buyers.

The DRC will therefore continue working with the private sector, development partners, and U.S. stakeholders to transform the country's AGOA eligibility into durable export growth, increased local processing and tangible improvements in the lives of the Congolese people.

About the Ministry of External Trade

The Ministry of External Trade is responsible for promoting the commercial interests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, supporting the competitiveness of Congolese products, facilitating access to regional and international markets and coordinating national initiatives intended to expand and diversify the country's exports.

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