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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ZAIRE

ISSUE

Respect for human rights in a developing country like Zaire depends largely on the harmonious unfolding of the democratic process. However, the economic situation is deplorable, and President Mobutu is clinging to power by force.

Since Mobutu's famous speech of April 24, 1990 announcing a new openness to democracy, the country has experienced a measure of freedom of speech. The people, awakened to democracy, immediately began to entertain high hopes. By contrast, a marked deterioration has occurred on nearly all other points.

The already catastrophic economic situation has continued to deteriorate. The attempt to introduce a five million "Zaire" bill last January triggered other shameless looting by the military, and a more recent attempt to introduce a new currency unit, the "Zaire lourd", has been the cause of the total destruction of the city of Kananga by the army. Civil servants are still unpaid. Zaire has a great economic potential but its realization is conditional upon resolving the political impasse.

BACKGROUND

Following Mobutu's promise to allow for multipartism, resulting from national and international pressure, the country has been experiencing a state of profound political crisis with no end in sight. Human rights have been grossly violated on many occasions, notably during the pillaging of October 1991, during January and February 1993, and more recently, during the destruction of the town of Kananga, which was resisting the introduction of a new currency unit. The Tshisekedi government has requested a multinational force to assist in the unfolding of the democratic process, but the UN Secretary-General's representative has had to limit his efforts to humanitarian problems in the Kasai and Kivu provinces. The suffering endured by the people of Zaire can also be attributed to the pitiful mismanagement of the country's finances. For example, the uncontrolled printing of money has caused spontaneous inflation, further aggravating the population's difficult living conditions. At the same time, large sums of money are being diverted for other purposes from regular currency channels.

Realizing that the institutions emerging from the National Sovereign Conference (NSC) were seeking a greater share of the political power, Mobutu has done everything in his power to obstruct the democratic process. Not only has he had the army intimidate the opposition but also, he dismissed the Prime Minister chosen by the NSC and put in his place a Prime Minister of his choosing. The resulting split of institutions has led to an impasse, which the presidential faction has not been able to resolve.

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