

## General

Despite its immense natural resources, Zaïre is one of the poorest countries in the world. A former Belgian colony, it became independent on June 30, 1960. Shortly thereafter, fighting between opposing factions broke out, leading to the intervention of a UN peacekeeping force in Zaïre. Major achievements in the transportation and agricultural sectors are required before Zaïre can fulfil its potential to become one of the wealthiest countries in Africa.

## Political and Economic Situation

The Mouvement populaire de la révolution (MPR), proclaimed in 1971, was until recently the only legal party. Executive power has rested almost exclusively in the hands of President Mobutu. He seized power in a bloodless coup on November 24, 1968, and was re-elected unopposed in 1984 for a third seven-year mandate. In the context of decisions aiming at achieving a greater degree of democracy, the president recently introduced a number of reforms, most importantly authorizing a multi-party system and trade union pluralism. For his part, the president resigned as Chairman of the MPR while reserving the role of leader and mediator.

Zaïre is the world's largest producer of cobalt, second largest of industrial diamonds and fourth largest of copper. It also produces large quantities of zinc. Minerals account for 60 per cent of export receipts. The country has enormous agricultural potential, although it imports over 125 000 tonnes of food annually. Zaïre also has immense forestry resources and a huge hydroelectric potential.

Due in good part to Zaïre's public foreign debt, estimated at US\$7.2 billion, short-term prospects appear bleak. However, longer-term forecasts are brighter.