



# World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

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## **“Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?”**

The word ‘Congo’ at the United Nations brings to mind two things: one is a messy UN peacekeeping operation in the early 1960s; the second is a massive, recent conflict – some have called it “World War Three” – in which millions of people lost their lives. The brushfire of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has now been extinguished, but its ashes are still smoldering, especially in the eastern Ituri region.

Can the UN bring peace to Africa’s troubled heartland? Will the DRC’s natural resources prove to be an asset or an obstacle to fostering peace? Will the country be ready for elections before the end of 2005?

These are some of the questions addressed by the guest on this edition of World Chronicle: William Lacy Swing, the head of the UN’s peacekeeping mission in the DR Congo (MONUC).

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**ANNOUNCER:** From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**JENKINS:** Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins and this is **World Chronicle**.

Mention the word 'Congo' here at the United Nations and two things come to mind.

One: a messy peacekeeping operation in the early 1960s, in which the UN's Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, died in a plane crash.

The second is a massive, recent conflict – some called it “World War Three” – in which more than two and a half million people lost their lives.

Now the brushfire of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – or “DRC”, in the language of diplomacy – has been extinguished. But the ashes are still smoldering. Can the UN bring peace to Africa's troubled heartland?

Our guest today is William Lacy Swing, head of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo, also known as MONUC.

Ambassador Swing, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a country the size of Western Europe. Millions of people have died, I've seen estimates that go as high as 5 million. As many as 6 armies from 6 different countries in Africa had been involved, and yet surprisingly little of this is known in the western world. I'm sure very few Americans know about what's been going on. And much of it has been sustained by raping and pillaging of the Congo's incredible natural resources: gold, diamonds and what have you. When we faced a similar situation with Al Qaeda, the decision was to drain the swamp to take the money away; and it's been done pretty effectively. Why is it that so many years later we have still been unable to prevent what are often western companies from pillaging the natural resources of the Congo, and providing the funds that have enabled this conflict to keep going for so long?

**SWING:** Let me first of all perhaps add to some of the statistics on the heritage of the war if I might. You're quite right - we use the figure 3.5 million who were dead from the war, most of these indirectly, health clinics that were damaged throughout the country; 3.4 million displaced persons, about 600,000 refugees in all nine of their neighbor's countries. We have 17 million without enough to eat. You've got about 1.3 million with HIV/AIDS, and the list goes on. One of the reasons I think that we've been unable to stop this pillaging has been the limited capacity of the government that has been created through 44 years of mismanagement of the economy in the government, bad government - about 12 years of chronic instability and just over 4 years of actual war.

**JENKINS:** Do you accept my premise that if we were able to stop some of this pillaging then we would be draining some of the money away that has allowed the situation to fester for so long?

**SWING:** I'm not sure I understand...

**JENKINS:** Well, the money to...you need money to make war basically.

**SWING:** Yeah. Well there's no doubt that there is a connection between the exportation of the resources illegally and the need to import arms because one fuels the other. And I think we've been fairly successful in recent times in breaking that vicious cycle there. We, as you probably know from the latest resolution of the Security Council, are now required to run an arms embargo. In fact we are repositioning all of our forces into the eastern part of the country where the arm smuggling is taking place to do that. And with the deployments that we're doing now, we think that we can stop the illegal exploitation. The difficulty is that this is a very rich country in terms of resources but it ranks no. 167 on a list of 175 by the UNDP, so clearly resources are not helping the people.

**JENKINS:** Ambassador Swing, we're joined today by Philippe Bolopion of Radio France Internationale and by Bill Reilly of United Press International. Bill, do you want to jump in here?

**REILLY:** Well, we were talking about the assets of the country and it really is substantial, fabulous really: gold, diamonds, coltan used for cell phones. What else, timber...what happened to rubber? Rubber used to be a big product out of...

**SWING:** You're quite right; there were large rubber plantations particularly in both Equator and Oriental provinces two of the very large provinces of the eleven. It like many other things couldn't compete in the end partly because of mismanagement of the economy and went the way that a number of things did at the time. The forests are still there to be used for the good of the people. Our estimates are that the Congo has an excess of 50% of all the remaining tropical hard woods in Africa. They have 10 to 12% of the world's hydro-electric capacity in an area which basically lacks water, south of there in Southern Africa.

**JENKINS:** They have the potential to be the breadbasket of Africa essentially?

**SWING:** Well, in point of fact at independence they were a net exporter of food and today there's a great importation of food because the agriculture has not come back to where it was.

**BOLOPION:** I'd like to jump back quickly to what Dr. Swing is saying. Do you feel that you have the resources to accomplish the mission that has been given to you by the Security Council? You were talking about new arm embargo? It seems almost an impossible task given

that the number of troops that you have in the eastern part of the country. Do you feel that there is the political will to back the mission that has been given to you?

**SWING:** We're quite pleased with the resolution that we received in July of 2003 from the Security Council because while they gave us a lot of new responsibilities, they gave us a lot of additional resources. We had 8,700 troops before and we went up to 10,800.

**JENKINS:** Is that enough?

**SWING:** Well, I'm not prepared to say until have the chance to try to use these to the maximum extent possible. What I'm doing is several things; first of all, because there's no longer along the ceasefire, which divided the country in half, we've been able to move all those forces to the eastern extremities of the country along the lakes with Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.

**JENKINS:** So just to make this clear to our viewers, in other words the six foreign nations that surround Congo, in fact there are nine nations....that the six nations that were involved in fighting in the DRC, all of those have pulled out, there are no longer any incursions from any of them?

**SWING:** That is correct. This was the second phase of the peace process to have all of the foreign troops go home. However, left in the Congo and causing a lot of trouble are many remaining rebel forces, in other words that were fighting the governments who were involved in the war. The largest number come from Rwanda and there are smaller groups from both Uganda and Burundi. One of our major tasks is to remove these people, to send them home. I don't want to get in to an estimate of how many there are. There are thousands; we have already removed close to 8,000, which include some family members. And we think that we will have a plan that will allow us to finish that programme in the course of this year 2004.

**JENKINS:** So in other words you've got enough troops to displace to the most troubled part of the country - the eastern part of the country. You think for the moment, that what you're trying to do at the moment - you have enough troops for that task?

**SWING:** That's right. We're concentrated in the Ituri district, which is a small district of one of the eleven provinces, which is about the size of Sierra Leone in West Africa or probably this if you were in the states - we're about the size of the state of Maryland. We have about 4,700 troops there. and the remainder are south of there in the Kivu provinces where the war began. With that we are removing the foreign-armed elements, we are helping humanitarian organizations to go back in to help the people, and we are running this arms embargo. Now, whether it will be enough in the end - we have to wait and see how effective we are. We are also repositioning our Riverine units to the lakes to control the arms importation.

**BOLOPION:** Do you feel your troops are equipped enough, trained enough to face difficult situation as the one that erupted in Bunia a few months ago, and that led the French forces to come with stronger troops? Do you feel like given the fragility of the situation, the military—this positively is enough?

**SWING:** Well definitely...our troops are definitely adequate to the task. But I'm glad you asked that question because I would like to say again how appreciative the United Nations is of the French-led European Union force who was called Operation Artemis, did a wonderful job from June 1 of 2003 to September 1 of 2003. In those three months they did several things: they stabilized the capital of the district, Bunia town; they disarmed many elements of the armed groups; and they bought the UN the time it needed to assemble a credible force. Now, three of the battalions that are in there come from the countries that have the most peacekeeping experience. And they are heavily equipped for what we call Chapter 7 Mandate – which means you can use all necessary force to ensure the peace; that means to protect yourselves, to protect the civilian population and to put down armed elements who try to attack.

**REILLY:** You said that troops are adequate for the operation. How about the leadership? Like Joseph Kabila is a very young man to be president. He took over after his father was assassinated. And in early February of 2004, the governor of South Kivu was suspended because he was trying to recruit mercenaries. What's the leadership like in Congo of the civilians...amongst the civilians?

**SWING:** I think in point of fact that the accomplishments today are really quite remarkable. When you consider that less than 18 months ago the group who now formed the government were fighting one another and were killing both sides. There was a lot of damage going on. And now they're together in the same government cooperating. At least a half dozen elements who were at war; they're all back there together. Now that you raised a question of the governors, which is a very important question because that is the next big step that the government has to take – is to replace some of the governors in the 11 provinces with those who now are nominated by the new coalition government.

**BOLOPION:** I know you're a career diplomat but I really want to ask you that question. It's a bit what you are saying earlier – you have been in the UN for several days now, you see how much work is going to Iraq, how much money is spread there, how many troops are there. Do you sometimes feel that it's unfair when you are in-charge of the situation with millions of people who died, with hundred and thousands of them in very, very difficult situation? Do you feel sometimes that Africa doesn't get the attention it should?

**SWING:** Look, I think that all of us who are worthy of the name of peacekeepers need to be telling the story of peacekeeping to the public, the broad public, wherever they may

be, that peacekeeping since 1948 has rung up a total of 29.8 billion dollars. And if you put that in the broader perspective of monies being spend elsewhere, it clearly is a ...it is not a huge sum for the accomplishments that one can point to. Africa has tended always to get the least attention. As someone who spent his entire career in Africa, obviously I would like to see that changed. Because I think there are enormous resources, human resources, mineral resources, all sorts of things open spaces where economies can grow, there's so much there and we need the political weight of Africa. And one of the reasons you want a stable Congo is because Congo is -- the Central African region, I would argue is the only sub-region in Africa that does not have a political center of gravity. And we have to help the Congo to arrive at that.

**REILLY:** Are you going to have a center of gravity by having an election next year in the Congo?

**SWING:** We are very much committed to the proposition - and this is based on two electoral missions that had been there - that the elections foreseen for June of 2005 are both technically and logistically quite feasible. The issue becomes one of whether all of the legislative and political acts that need to be done can be done in time for that. We believe it can be done; let me tell you what they are:

One has to pass seven or eight laws including a law on political parties, a law on nationality, a law on decentralization, a law to create an independent electoral commission, etc.

One has to build a new integrated army, a new integrated national police force.

The UN has to - working with the government of the Congo and its neighbors - we have to help them complete the process of removing all of the foreign-armed elements that need to go home; to have two-way traffic to bring the 600,000 refugees back and to allow the internally displaced people to go home.

**JENKINS:** I think we get the picture.

**SWING:** It all has to be done, but...

**JENKINS:** A huge number of tasks.

**SWING:** ... we're confident it can be done.

**JENKINS:** I read that you recently said that technically it was feasible, to hold the election by 2005. The question was a question of political will, and I want to ask you about that but let me just say that this is **World Chronicle**, our guest is William Lacy Swing, the head of UN peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We're talking about war and peace in the heart of Africa, here's our report:

**VIDEO ROLL-IN (TRT: 2'43")**

**NARRATOR:** It's been described as "the greatest logistics challenge in the history of United Nations Peacekeeping". MONUC, the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, monitors and verifies the implementation of ceasefire agreements and the disengagement of troops.

The country has long endured a bloody war. An estimated 2.5 million people have been killed either as a direct result of fighting or because of disease and malnutrition worsened by war conditions. And, the conflict still rages in some regions. As a result, Congo's infrastructure has simply collapsed.

When MONUC arrived in 1999, the UN's planners faced many difficulties in setting up this huge and complex peacekeeping mission. MONUC'S Chief of Communications, Henry Thompson:

**THOMPSON:** "Congo is a communication man's nightmare simply because it's an extremely large country. It's a country with basically no telecommunication infrastructure."

**NARRATOR:** The security of personnel hinges on effective communications. MONUC created the country's largest telecommunications network.

Thousands of military advisors were deployed all over this vast country. An important issue for the mission is how to transport people and goods in a safe and speedy manner. There is no question about the use of roads according to MONUC'S Chief of Movement Control, Melva Crouch:

**CROUCH:** "We only use trucks for field transport to and from airports and barges. Certainly in terms of main routes linking cities, they really do not exist or exist in such an abysmal state that they are not useable."

**NARRATOR:** So aircraft are the most widely used form of transportation for the UN Peacekeepers. Some 250 people are involved with MONUC air operations. Fifty-four airfields are used throughout the DRC. The mission's forty aircraft make it the largest air fleet in the country.

Before the war, river barges were the principal means of transportation. But instability has made river travel a security risk. In April 2002, the Congo River was reopened for traffic. To promote security and build confidence, MONUC River Units have been escorting the commercial convoys. And the mission itself is using the rivers for transporting its' own supplies.

**VIDEO ROLL-OUT**

**JENKINS:** So I'd like to get back to my earlier question about political will. The president of the DRC, Joseph Kabila, is just 32, 33 something like that, a very young man in charge of this vast country with recent enormous laundry list of problems that you've described so eloquently. I read recently that he had said that he doesn't really have much need for UN peacekeepers anymore, that he'd rather have them start to train an army up for him. Does that raise suspicions that he's trying to cement his hold on power at the expense of those who'd been brought into government with him in order to end the civil war? Is there a political will there to transform the DRC into a democracy?

**SWING:** I read that context that statement in the context of two things. One is a commitment that he and President Kagame of Rwanda made on November 27 in Pretoria – to do their best to see that the foreign-armed groups are taken out of the country by - within 12 months. Perhaps a little bit in that context. And secondly, I think he knows that we are all, in the international community, committed to the proposition that the Congo needs a new integrated army, they need a new national police force. In fact we've just held a meeting in recent days to consider what the international community might do to ensure that those two institutions are created. So I see that more as a statement of the urgency and he understands better than I suppose any of us that these things have to happen before you can have proper elections six months later in June of 2005. So that was my understanding of what he said.

**JENKINS:** You also gave us a list of all of the steps that need to be taken to make elections happen. When you talk about political will, is there any doubt on your mind that Kabila and the parliament have the political will necessary to get us over with all those obstacles that you mentioned?

**SWING:** Well my exchanges with him on a fairly regular basis - and this is both the President and the members of the cabinet as well as the National Assembly and the Senate - is that they're all committed to doing this elections in terms of - the article 196 of the constitution says it shall happen in June 2005. So all of us have an obligation to work toward that deadline and I think the commitment is there.

**BOLOPION:** Well, one of the main remaining problems seems to be small groups in the Eastern parts where you have Sudanese, small wars erupting. Sometimes it's very difficult to understand what's happening whether it's ethnic violence, whether it is related to exploitation of resources. Can you get a hold on that region? Do you feel that you are establishing the UN authority there?

**SWING:** If those incidents, which we see about all the time in the media, are partly the result of the absence of the state. The state is not been able to extend its authority to those farther reaches of the country. I think with the appointment of the governors, which should take



place very shortly, we'll partly address that. I think it's also that there is not yet in place a national programme to disarm and demobilize all of these groups that have been doing the fightings –it's particularly true in the Ituri district in the Northeastern corner where we have to work to get those people disarmed, demobilized and into some kind of a programme where these former groups either go into the new army or they go into some kind of community activities, in other words a civilian life.

**BOLOPION:** It seems that many reports by the UN, very good reports about the illegal exploitations, have been published, and lots of firms have been denounced for doing business with people they shouldn't be dealing with in Congo. And now this panel has been ended. Do you feel that problem has been solved, or are you still concerned that the traffics are still going on in the eastern part of the country?

**SWING:** I think that the situation's improving daily and as we speak as we are able to ourselves deploy into all those corners where this is been occurring and as the government trains its own force to go in, I really do think that we need to be focused however on the future – how does one build a stable region because...

**JENKINS:** I like to ask you about that...

**SWING:** Let me just finish that one little point here. The government can change many things, we cannot change its geography, and therefore one needs to work toward that end.

**JENKINS:** Sorry. Two things that come out about - sorry to interrupt. We heard talk a few years back about the Kivus splitting off; they even used a separate currency. Is there a sense amongst all the Congolese, that you can ascertain, that they feel as if they belong to the same nation, the same state, that they are all Congolese. I mean, we heard about how impossible it is to get from one part of the country to the other. They're completely cut off from each other. Do they show a sense of national...?

**SWING:** That's a very interesting question you raise, and I'd like to answer it very directly because I think if one, what we are looking for, one of the main reasons for encouragement about this difficult process, it would be exactly this point – that despite nearly five years of war, there was never any talk of cessation as you had in 1960 with the original UN deployment. And today I think all of us who were there can tell you that the Congolese people are united, they have a sense of national personality and national unity; they want to stay together. It is true in the eastern part of the country they can't even get the regular radio broadcast from Kinshasa. They listen to this Swahili broadcast out of East Africa. That doesn't do anything though in terms of their unity – they're still together.

**JENKINS:** We just last week, at the UN, had a funding conference for Liberia - raised more than half-a-billion dollars. Does the Congo need something similar to that? Are we a lot closer to that point?

**SWING:** We are, and we do need it. I should be able to report some good news at least that in the economic area we had a donor's conference, what's called a Consultant Group meeting of the World Bank in Paris from December 17 to 19 in 2003, and they identified 3.9 billion dollars for the Congolese effort. Now one still has to look for additional money to help them with elections, that'll be a costly exercise: to help them with the new national army for equipment and with the new national police. But we have strong...in fact I would argue that the Congo currently enjoys the strongest international support since independence.

**JENKINS:** Ambassador Swing I can't let you go without asking you about something rather personal, which is that I noticed that your daughter is a peacekeeper. One, is she currently serving? If so, where? And two, given what you've seen going on in the Congo where after all peacekeepers had been attacked and some have died, does that keep you awake at night?

**SWING:** She has served in Croatia, in Bosnia, and she was, when I arrived in the Congo part of MONUC, part of the UN operation in the Congo.

**JENKINS:** Really? So you are her commanding officer...

**SWING:** She was in Golan but we moved quickly to move her to another post because I think both she and I were very uncomfortable with it.

**JENKINS:** You can't be in the same country together?

**SWING:** Not under my command. But so she is currently at our new mission in Cote d'Ivoire in Abidjan. Since two weeks.

**JENKINS:** Does that give you pause?

**SWING:** Not really. She's a very dedicated peacekeeper. It's what she wants to do and we're pleased that she wants to do it and obviously one occasionally wonders how she's doing but...I'm quite happy about it.

**JENKINS:** She must be an optimist at heart. I take it that you're an optimist as well. This whole discussion I have to say has been far more optimistic than I was expecting. I thought you'd say that Congo was still a bloody mess, frankly. And you're saying it seems to be well on the right path.

**SWING:** I think what motivates me is that having spent most of my adult life in Africa, I see a country like the Congo, which probably, more than any other place I can think of right now, were it to be stable politically and be able to develop its vast economy would probably have a greater effect on the rest of the central African probably Africa than any other

situation that I currently can think of and I think that's a strong reason. I have been called a congenital optimist and I guess I have to accept the label.

**JENKINS:** Well, as you see, it must have brushed off on your daughter. I think you have to be an optimist to be a peacekeeper as well, and certainly dedicated to the cause of peace. Ambassador Swing I'm afraid that's all the time we have. Thank you very much for joining us.

Our guest today has been William Lacy Swing, the head of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He was interviewed by Philippe Bolopion of Radio France Internationale, and Bill Reilly of United Press International.

I'm Tony Jenkins, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

**ANNOUNCER:** Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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