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Problematic of the exclusion of the Democratic Republic of Congo from AGOA: Efforts made for its reintegration

By

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Memoir:

Presented for the purpose of the admissibility of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the AGOA benefits.

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FOREWORD

The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United States of America share a longstanding diplomatic, economic and sociocultural mutual relation.

In regards to the historical relationship between the two countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's newly elected President Felix-Antoine TSHISEKEDI TSHILOMBO made his first official working visit to the United States.

During his official visit, the newly elected President vowed to warm up bilateral relations with the US and paved the way for a win-win economic partnership

President Tshisekedi's plea included the DRC's return to the AGOA economic zone since being suspended in 2010 following many causes the DRC officials are trying to improve.

The United States direct investments during the 70s boosted and opened up the then Zaïre economy (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). US firms Good Year, General Motors, Chevron Texaco, Midema, Intercontinental Hotel, World Trade Center, Citibank, Motorola and many more entered the Zaïre market and speeded up the economy. Zaïre currency was traded two US dollars a unit.

As soon as the DRC joined AGOA in 2005 till the country's forced exit in 2010, US direct investments led to the creation of ten new companies providing an estimate 1510 new jobs. It's clear that the country exclusion from AGOA have had a negative impact on the economy.

Both the people of Congo and US citizens have the potential to claim the lead of the world economy in Africa as well as in the West if they choose to mutual their economic efforts based on the DRC's natural and geological resources.

Being one of the country's lead voice, the DRC civil society is actively performing an advocacy that is meant to bringing forward the latest development in face of the causes that led to DRC forced exit from AGOA. The advocacy raises every reported progress in respectives fields the country once defaulted so that it qualifies for a reinstate in AGOA.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The following memorandum seeks the reintegration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo into AGOA and the fully withdrawal of the sanctions imposed by the US Administration on 1 January 2011.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was excluded from the AGOA's beneficiary countries on 23 December 2010 following reports on human rights violations, especially women targeted rape. The sanctions imposed by the Obama Administration have led to negative economic impacts and affected the people of Congo for about ten years now.

Plan

Apart from the introductory chapter and the forthcoming general conclusion, the following memorandum is divided in two main parts. The first part shares the primary insights over AGOA whereas the second part highlights the reasons as to why the DRC qualifies to be reintegrated into AGOA. The informations shared on this plea were recorded from 2010 to 2019.

CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW

What is AGOA

The African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), is a US law that was passed and promulgated in May 2000 by the US Congress under President Bill Clinton. As the most prodigious trade program linking the United States to Africa, AGOA was a key element of US development policy towards the African continent, in which trade was seen as a key driver of growth and development in a rapidly globalizing economy. It is a modern vision of economic growth and development through trade.

What are the AGOA benefits

AGOA aims to:

- promote trade and investment between the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa by granting admitted countries preferential access to the US market;
- encourage economic development and reforms in sub-Saharan Africa;
- promote greater access and opportunities to investors and businesses in sub-Saharan Africa;
- eliminate tariffs on textiles and clothing from sub-Saharan Africa;
- promote diversification in african poorest countries;
- encourage the use of technical assistance to consolidate reforms and economic development.
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Country Eligibility Criteria for AGOA

Under section 104 of AGOA Act, an eligibility criteria is sets out for a country seeking to join the AGOA. The list includes:

- a market-based economy
- The rule of law
- Political pluralism
- business fairness rules and the right to due process
- barriers elimination to U.S. trade and investment
- economic policies to reduce poverty
- An anti corruption and anti bribery mechanism
- protection of internationally recognized worker rights

Historical facts on AGOA's evolution

Before the year 2000, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was the only cooperation framework between the United States and a number of african countries. The sole advantage under this cooperation framework was the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which provided preferential measures allowing duty-free entry for more than 4,650 products. Under

the current AGOA trade system the GSP was extended adding about 1,800 new exploitable products to 6,300 products for an even more diversified exploitation.

A high level summit was held in 1998 between african Heads of State and the US President. Closer talks were held on the summit sidelines to discuss a possible bilateral trade mechanism between Africa and the US. On his speech, US President Bill Clinton quoted : "Africa can do," Africa can, it can enjoy its resources, Africa can develop, Africa can meet the challenge; hence, the creation of AFRICANDO, which is an area of direct free trade, African and American trade. Some products such as agribusiness, computer and others can enter and exit in the US without tax." To implement AFRICANDO, a fields body named "AGOA" was set up. This structure grants approval to countries eligible to become members of AGOA and thus willing to benefit from this free trade area.

AGOA matches the aspirations of the US and eligible sub saharan countries and it offers a tremendous amount of opportunities that shape their local economies.

AGOA has led to an increase of about 500% in exports to the US from african countries the last decade and created nearly 1.3 million new jobs. Meanwhile, the AGOA Acts requires improvements in terms of products diversification and the change of the african economic structure.

Various amendments on the terms and conditions of the initial AGOA Act have been adopted by the United States Congress since the law was passed in year 2000.

The new provisions included a number of technical changes, the broadening of the initial scope as well as an extension of the law:

- AGOA V - extension of third countries' tissue preferences by 2015
- AGOA IV - Title VI of the Tax Rebate and Health Care Act 2006
- AGOA III - AGOA Acceleration Act 2004
- AGOA II - Amendments to AGOA Law
- Amended four times, the AGOA Act was extended until September 30, 2025.

In July 2015, US President Barack Obama extended the AGOA Act until 2025.

His assistant Michael Froman described AGOA as "the cornerstone [...] for 15 years" of trade relations between the United States and Africa.

The DRC admission into AGOA

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was admitted into AGOA in year 2003. Meanwhile, the country was one of the AGOA founding countries in 2000 as the law was passed by the US Congress. In 2009, the DRC exports balance to the US market amounted to US\$ 300,000,000 going straight to the Congolese treasury. The duty-free exports and tax exempt included wood, minings, oil products, agricultural products and a number of finished products.

Management of the AGOA issue by the Congolese Government

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was admitted into AGOA in 2003. However, the DRC's entrance did not enjoy much interest within the country. Both the US and DRC Governments did not invest much efforts to get the bilateral partnership appropriated by their peoples.

The US Government did not promote the AGOA Act across the DRC. The workers within the US Embassy in Kinshasa have no meaningful insights about the African Growth Opportunity Act. Until 2019, the US Embassy in Kinshasa had one single economic counselor with whom AGOA was not a priority. Nevertheless, we recently received a commitment from the US State Department to appoint a second economic counselor who is going to deal with all matters related to AGOA in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Upon joining AGOA in 2003, the Democratic Republic of Congo appointed the country Ministry for External Trade to manage every aspects related to AGOA. The Ministry Chief Cabinet was to act as the focal point for AGOA. The year 2003 was characterized by political instabilities in the DRC (with an Inter congolese political Dialogue being hosted in Sun City, South Africa). Since that time, the country has gone through a series of Government changes and ministerial reshuffle with a new Minister for External Trade being appointed on each occasion. Whenever a sitting Minister had to leave office due to a Government reshuffle, nobody was left behind to manage AGOA's related matters. That's one of the main reasons as to why AGOA was never fully implemented in the DRC.

DRC's exclusion AGOA's beneficiary states

All over the sudden, the DRC was excluded on 23 December 2010 by President Obama from the list of AGOA beneficiary countries following

- Failures to comply with human rights respect
- Large-scale use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, especially in the east of the country

On 23 December 2010, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was suspended from AGOA's beneficiary countries following reports on human rights violations and the use of sexual violence as a weapon in Eastern Congo.

About the diplomatic relations between the US and the Democratic Republic of Congo

The diplomatic relationship between the donor state and the beneficiary states does not have an impact over the eligibility criteria into AGOA. However stronger it is. A preferential treatment is granted to a country following its level of economic development. The least developed countries are offered preferences along with all the rules and regulations. The beneficiary states do not have influence over the US Government choice to grant preferences.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo suspension from AGOA did not affect diplomatic ties between the two countries. Since the country's forced exit from AGOA, the US Embassy

in Kinshasa remained open and carried out businesses as usual. The diplomatic relationship between the two countries remained as good as it use to be.

About Congolese social and economic life

The Democratic Republic of the Congo suspension from AGOA has had a greater social impact on the country. The sanctions directly affected the struggling congolese economy.

Following its exclusion from AGOA, the DRC subsequently lost the status its enjoyed as a US privileged trading partner. The exports coming from the country to the US do no longer benefit from the many advantaged offered under the AGOA Act. The DRC lost franchise and does no longer enjoy the unlimited quota of the items entering the US.

Discussions under the DRC Ministry for External Trade to reintegrate AGOA

The DRC Ministry for External Trade has recently launched direct talks with the US counterpart so that the country could be reinstated into AGOA. As a follow up, DRC has been invited to attend the 20th AGOA Summit to defend its bide for a reintegration into AGOA.

The later awakening and the civil society involvement

The AGOA Civil Society Network was created on january 2003 in the aftermath of the AGOA civil society forum held in Phoenix (Mauritus). 102 civil society organisations attended the Forum coming from the US, Mauritania, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Namibia, Mali, Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A report from the AGOA Civil Society Network noted an increase of beneficiary countries within AGOA from 2001 to 2015. The list of beneficiary countries has literally doubled. The report also portrays that the beneficiary countries trade balance with the US amounted to \$50 billions in 2014 (reaching US \$100 billions in 2018). Oil products amounted for 69% of AGOA countries export to the US in 2014.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was suspended from AGOA in 2011 following a failure to comply with human rights.

The AGOA Civil Society Network is a consortium organizations including:

- non-governmental organizations,
- small and medium scale enterprises,
- chambers of Commerce
- and have attracted many other interested partners within the US and Africa as the AGOA implementation was successful leading to greater advantages both for the American people and the people in African beneficiary countries.

The Network mission seeks to empower the African people through civil society organizations; to work with Governments and businesses to derive the best benefits from

AGOA by developing trade between the United States of America and Africa. Also, the Network seeks to speed up economic development and good governance (accountability, transparency and collective work), sustainable development, democracy as well as human rights empowerment.

The AGOA Civil Society Network secretariat and the DRC delegates having attended the 20th AGOA Forum civil society sessions that was held in Miami, from 25 to 27 September 2018, they mutually agreed to set a working cooperation by setting a AGOA Civil Society Network Chapter in the Democratic Republic of the Congo so that the country benefits from the 2015 Trade Expansion Act having extended the benefits under AGOA (including clothing and tissues provision in third world countries until 2025).

The AGOA Civil Society Network and the Syndicat d'Entraide Chretienne agreed to mutual their efforts, use their skills and ressources establishing a AGOA Civil Society Network chapter in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Civil society organizations in the Democratic Republic of Congo were not involved when the country decided to join AGOA. Similarly, the civil society did not account in every action undertaken by the state under AGOA. The DRC Ministry for External Trade was the only person to deal with AGOA. In 2018, thanks to the AGOA Civil Society Network Secretariat in Washington, the DRC civil society was sensitized and mobilized to attend the 20th AGOA Forum.

The DRC delegation having attended the AFRICANDO/AGOA Summit was made of the country Ministry for Budget, the Ministry for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, the Ministry for External Trade, the members of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), the members of the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH), the members of the Congolese Control Office (OCC), Government officials and the members of the Haut Katanga Legislative Assembly , the Mayor of Kolwezi and civil society actors. The congolese delegation made a plea for the reintegration of DRC into AGOA. The only problem with that was some members in the DRC delegation selected themselves as delegates seeking no consent from their institutions.

Advocacy from the AGOA Civil Society Network

The advocacy being directed by the civil society seeks to:

- have the Congolese officials to face their responsibilities and to play an active role so that mutual trades with the US are standardized and the country is reinstated into AGOA;
- sensitize the US decision-makers on the latest efforts by the DRC to match AGOA eligibility criteria so that the country is reinstated
- have the american people to understand that AGOA is an opportunity they need to benefit from and to have america back in the DRC and Africa;
- pave the way for a win-win trade cooperation between US and DRC investors and busiesspersons for the years to come. Offering to the DRC and its people an opportunity to have trade with a credible country whose people love them.

CHAPTER II: GOOD REASONS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF THE DRC INTO THE AGOA

Positive evolution of the rule of law and Human Rights from 2010

Massive amounts of human rights violations were recorded in the DRC by 2010, thus becoming the main cause behind the DRC removal from AGOA. Meanwhile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has invested tremendous efforts to come out of the situation. These efforts were made to ensure that human rights and human dignity are preserved and respected. The country's Leadership sees it as the only way forward to enjoy a good reputation as a country and recover international legitimacy.

The commitments from the country's new Leadership

During the 40th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva later this year, the DRC Minister for Human Rights quoted: "Since the new ruling Regime was installed, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is committed, under the new Leadership, to keep on giving the best of itself as a country in order to improve its human rights status." On her detailed report, the DRC Minister for Human Rights Mrs. Marie-Ange MUSHOBEKWA provided a number of examples highlighting the efforts being made by the country in promoting and empowering respect for human rights.

On her remarks during the 40th Human Rights Council Session, the Minister for Human Rights also pointed out DRC's first peaceful transfer of power between an outgoing President Mrs Joseph KABILA and Mrs Felix TSHISEKEDI, the incoming President serving as a good example to the entire world. She too mentioned the new President's availability extended to his election main rival as well as to the Congolese diaspora.

"Sooner upon taking office, DRC President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi stressed out the necessity to promote and protect human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He said this was going to be one of his main priorities. Adding actions into words, President Felix Tshisekedi lifted the ban on public demonstrations. This opening is having a greater impact as President Felix TSHISEKEDI's main rival during the 2018 presidential race Mr Martin FAYULU is free to hold rallies and protests across the country. His activities are being shown on the National Television (RTNC) and broadcasted on many other TV and radio stations held by the state, Mrs Marie-Ange MSHOBEKWA quoted.

In his inaugural address, President Felix TSHISEKEDI pledged to "guarantee the free exercise of fundamental rights to every citizen" and to put an end to any type of discrimination. He too said His Government was going to lead "an effective and determined fight against corruption, impunity, bad governance and tribalism". Since then, He has taken meaningful steps. These steps included the release of political prisoners who were arbitrarily detained for several years.

In March 2019, the newly elected President granted presidential pardon to 700 prisoners and allowed the release of a number of emblematic cases. The list of those freed included mostly well-known politicians and social activists such as:

- Mr Firmin Yangambi, a human rights activist and lawyer was arrested in 2009 and sentenced to death in 2010. He was accused of illegally detaining war weapons and on attempt to organize insurgency.
- Mr Franck Diongo, an Opposition leader arrested in 2016 and charged with kidnapping of three presidential guards.
- Mr Eugene Diomi Ndongala, an Opposition leader arrested and detained since 2013 charged with rape of a minor child.

Positive signals: Human rights violations decrease

According to the latest Report from the United Nation Joint Office for Human Rights (UNJHRO) released six months after President Felix TSHISEKEDI was sworn in, a decrease of 8% was recorded in regards to human rights violations in the DRC. The amount of human rights violations appears to be lesser than compared to the same period in 2018. The United Nations Joint Office for Human Rights (UNJHRO) explained the slight decrease as a result of the political openings announced by the newly sworn in president Mr Felix TSHISEKEDI.

The United Nations Joint Office for Human Rights Country Director Mr Abdoul AZIZ THIOYE noted the improvements and pointed out a slight opportunity to free exercise of civil and political rights. Mr Adoul AZIZ THIOYE explained that up to 59% of violations are being committed by the state officers, the police and the army. As of January to June this year, and according to data sent to the UN, a total number of 136 police officers and soldiers were convicted over human rights violations.

The set up and efficient work of the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH)

Under the Leadership of former President Joseph KABILA, the Democratic Republic of the Congo established the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) later in 2015. CNDH was created in line with the Congolese constitution (Article 222,p3) to affirm the country's commitment to human rights empowerment and fundamental liberties. The National Commission for Human Rights aims to assist the ruling authorities in meeting the obligations derived from the Constitution in regards to human rights preservation and respect. CNDH acts as an independent body investigating every reported human rights violation case. It rings the alarm to awaken both the state officials, the international community and many other players over human rights violations. CNDH has a decisive role of reminding the stakeholders of their responsibilities towards human rights.

In recognition for the outstanding and valuable actions favouring human rights and its working independence, the National Institute for Human Rights granted a status A to CNDH in respect to Paris Principles, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993.

The planning and adoption of drafted laws, examination and ratification of international treaties

The drafting, adoption and examination of legislative bills related to human rights preservation is one of the major steps (or advancements) towards human rights empowerment in the DRC. These binding instruments provide an opportunity to civil society organizations and trade unions to demand for their application on behalf of the entire population. Having in place such a mechanism is an opportunity as well as a proof that the DRC committed to the rule of law (A short list of legislative bills is enclosed. See Appendix 2).

To stress more on the recorded improvements, it worths mentioning that the Democratic Republic of the Congo reviewed and ratified a series of global and sub-regional treaties linking to the firm respect of human rights (See Appendix 6).

The drafting of the laws related to human rights empowerment and the ratification of international treaties is a pledge and it describes the good will the Congolese state shows working for the improvement of its human rights record. DRC civil society organizations also benefited from the various mechanism ratified by the state and used them to promote and claim for human rights.

Arrests, arbitrary and illegal detentions are reduced

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's Constitution states that: "No one may be prosecuted, arrested, detained or sentenced except by virtue of the law and in the form prescribed by it ..." (art. 17, 2). Meanwhile, this constitutional provision was not always respected. The people of Congo were being quiet oftenly arbitrarily arrested and illegally detained by the state authorities as well as by the National Intelligence Agency (ANR).

The freeing of 700 political prisoners in March this year is worth mentioning. It also worth reminding that the DRC Government released via a decree from the Justice Minister an estimate number of 24 political prisoners in 2016 as demanded by the political opposition and various human rights organizations. (See Appendix 5).

A new chief was appointed by President Felix TSHISEKEDI to chair the National Intelligence Agency. This move by the President signals a new era and the reevaluation of the country's prison system. It bears a clear desire to break with the past.

Improvement of detention conditions, limitation of tortures and medical treatment during detention

The various investigation reports published on the human rights statuses of people arrested and detained in DRC prisons had revealed some cases of torture; cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. The detainees are subjected to such ill-fated treatments by prison guards and sometimes to torture comes from fellow detainees. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was deeply concerned by the reports of human rights violations coming from prisons. The state took corrective measures to ensure that order is restored. The steps included:

- Adoption by the DRC Parliament in 2011 of the Law prohibiting the practice of torture;
- The ratification in 2010 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture [aimed at establishing a system of visits to places where people are deprived of their liberty]. This ratification was followed by:
 - the proclamation of the 9 July 2011 Law on criminalizing torture in the Democratic Republic of the Congo turning a list of practices of torture to an autonomous offense;
 - the operationalization in February 2019 of the National Institute for Judicial Training, "INAFORJ" whose role is to enhance the skills of judicial workers in implementing the Convention against Torture as well as the 9 July 2011 Law;
- Prevention against torture through public awareness and sensitisation around the law criminalizing cruel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Freedom of press and media space opening as well as freedom of expression

It is clear that the freedom of the press into DRC has yet to reach the desired universal threshold. However, a series of reforms were being implemented and the progresses made. Improvements include:

- during election period, the various Election Monitoring Missions noted serious advances related to freedom of press resulting to community free expressions, the private media and freedom of opinion;
- access was granted by the issuing authorities to private media throughout the african Great Lakes Region: TV stations, Radio stations, newspapers, online media and many more. In Kinshasa alone more than 40 news stations were admitted;
- the news stations (TV and radio) owned by opposition leaders were granted a permission to reopen: RTL M owned by Roger LUMBALA (RASSOP); Canal Congo TV (and CKTV) owned by Jean Pierre BEMBA (LAMUKA), Canal Future TV owned by Vital KAMERHE (CACH), Nyota TV owned by Moise KATUMBI (LAMUKA), RTVS1 owned by Adolphe MUZITO (LAMUKA) and many more.
- Since a new ruling Regime took over, people have witnessed state media openings. The activities being held by the opposition leaders are broadcasted on national télévision (RTNC). As Opposition leader Jean-Pierre BEMBA returned home as well as Mr Martin FAYULU, RTNC did broadcast their return criticizing at some extents the new President Felix TSHISEKEDI.
- Political debates, open antennas, public forums, face-to-face are being broadcasted on public and private télévisions with no restriction sometimes opposing the ruling coalition with opposition spokespersons. A series of talkshows such as "Parlons-en"(Let's Talk)" and " Le Débat" (Debate)" aired on Radio Top Congo or "Parole aux auditeurs" aired on Radio Okapi as well as "Le peuple parle" (The People Speak)" aired on Mercure TV are the examples of the new wave of freedom spreading over the country.

Freedom of assembly and public demonstrations

The right to public demonstrations was subjected to an initial permission being granted by the state officials after a mandatory information letter was submitted by the demonstration organizers on their planned protest. This is how it used to work out before political openings occurred. However, apart from the mandatory submission of an information letter to the state authorities before any demonstration could be held, deriving from the Congolese Constitution, and under the current ruling Regime in the DRC, public demonstrations' organizers are no longer required to seek for permission after submission. All they need to do is have a working-meeting with the authorities on practical matters related to demonstrators' safety during the demonstration. As of now, the duty to submit an information letter is rightly enforced by the public authorities and police forces: During recent events, police forces and the law enforcement agents were seen managing properly the crowds and ensuring public order and security with no sins being committed by them.

- On Tuesday, 3 July 2019, during the United Nations Human Rights Council 38th Session relating to human rights matters in the DRC, the UN Special Representative to the DRC, Mrs. Leila Zerougouli commended the current progress made by the country fighting the human rights violations. She pointed out that any police officer violating the right to public demonstration is subjected to investigation and based on the facts prosecuted. The Government takes care of the victims in such a case providing medical care.
- Motorized processions or caravans are hosted everywhere in the country by the Opposition leaders with no interference from the state or any fear of death among the attendants. Events are held in conjunction with Police forces but no clash are being reported. On 23 June 2019, Opposition leader Jean-Pierre BEMEBA's return to the country was preceded by a call to his MLC party members to show up in big numbers to welcoming his return; Following a call from LAMUKA on 21 November 2019 as Opposition leader Martin FAYULU returned home, the coalition members took to the streets; On a call from opposition party UDPS, the late opposition leader Etienne TSHISEKEDI has been massively welcome back on 27 July 2016.
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- Opposition parties protest marches and meetings are being organized without any fear of life loss and they are being professionally monitored by the Police. Several meetings were held in Kinshasa and the country provinces: At Ndjli Ste Therese with Martin Fayulu (), At Ndjli Ste Therese with Jean-Pierre Bemba () and at Boulevard Triomphal on 31 July 2016 with Etienne Tshisekedi;

The lifting of the ban on public demonstrations by President Felix-Antoine TSHISEKEDI is one of the major levers that show huge progress in human rights empowerment and preservation in the DRC.

Positive Results in the Fight against Gender-based Violence and Discrimination

So far, there has been a lot of progress being recorded in the fight. The many results, actions and commitments include:

- On International Women Day (8 March 2019), President Felix TSHISEKEDI promised during an official address at La Cite de l'Union Africaine to "set up an observatory for gender parity ... so that no woman or girl is left out;"
- In 2018, the DRC was removed from the UN blacklist of minor rape countries and sexual violence against women;
- Earlier this year, Mrs. Jeanine Mabunda Liyoko, a former Minister under the rule of former President Joseph Kabila, has been appointed and then elected Speaker of the DRC National Assembly: being the first woman to hold such a prominent position. As the President of National Assembly, she's ranked the DRC second most powerful person behind the Head of State;
- Madame Marie-Ange MUSHOBEKWA, the DRC Minister for Human Rights quoted that military officers in the DRC have been prosecuted, convicted and jailed of rape or complicity. The comment came as the Minister was sharing the eighth periodic report on the DRC during a session at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. In this regard, we hail and highlight the efforts by remarkable congolese citizens whose fight is to end sexual violences having brought tremendous contributions to the fight. A special attention is made with Dr. Denis MUKWEGE, who is a member of the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) and the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize co-winner.

Progress on the field of child rights

Progress were also recorded on the field of child rights in the DRC. These progress led to the withdrawal of FARDC (Congolese Defense Forces) from the UN blacklist of national armies using children in their ranks (august 2017). On a Report released on 5 October 2017, UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez cites that: "in regards to the withdrawal from the blaklist, the FARDC has undertaken all necessary measures in their action-plan to stop the use of children and this part has been removed from the list with regard to this violation.

Protecting internationally recognized workers' rights

With respect to the International Labor Organization Conventions:

- Social protest movements were being freely organized by the workers in Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and Lebanese-owned enterprises (Protest marches and other public demonstrations were held in Kinshasa by the workers in March and April 2019);
- The resumption of public servants gatherings at Golgotha Square (Rallies were held in June and July 2017)
- The daily minimum wage is increased from 1 to 4.2\$ in the private sector. (an increase compare to 2018).

Strengthening political democracy and pluralism

Since gaining independence, the Democratic Republic of Congo was face with repeated political crises and violent regimes change. For the first time in the country history, the democratic elections held on 30 December 2018 resumed with a peaceful transfer of power on 24 January 2019. The whole world witnessed a peaceful change of Leadership in the Congo: President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo succeeded Joseph Kabila Kabange. Everything happened peacefully and the move was widely upheld by the DRC citizens.

The aftermath of the 2018 elections signals the beginning of a newer political age within DRC to be consolidated by major reforms. These reforms will likely be to irreversibly provide significant trainings on matters related to peace, good governance and democratic freedoms to the Congolese people.

The newly elected ruling power in the Democratic Republic of Congo intends to rebuild the coutry on basis of a dynamic macroeconomic framework sustained by an innovative and efficient leadership.

Political pluralism is enshrined in the Democratic Republic of Congo by the Constitution. This is one among the other AGOA eligibility criteria. Pluralism is recognized in the DRC Constitution (Article 6). It allows the country to make considerable progress in the democratic field as it gives the people the opportunity to express their choice through pluralistic elections.

The process of building resilient democratic institutions and a strong economy was started few years ago by the outgoing Government through several reforms aimed at transforming the judicial system, ending corruption and sexual violences.

In his inaugural speech, the newly elected President made it clear regarding human rights violations, economic recovery and social justice, justice for all, good governance, the fight against corruption, the incese revenue, the rule of law and the restoration of the state authority over the entire Congolese territory.

Upon sworn in, President Felix-Antoine TSHISEKEDI implemented targeted actions having brought assurance and confidence on the DRC future. Among the many positive actions, it worth highlighting:

- The release of political prisoners
- The closing of secret (undercover) prisons
- Improvements on the living conditions of the army
- The return of political opponents from exile
- The freedom of expression and reopening of closed news stations
- The revival of military cooperation between the DRC, Belgium, France and the USA
- The reopening of La Maison Schengen
- The promise to introduce non-fee paying public éducation (at primary and secondary level)

- The creation of a special permanent body to combat corruption
- Strengthening measures for the eradication of armed groups in Eastern DRC
- The state commitment to the fight against Ebola epidemic.
- Over 600 active political parties in the country

Significant progress has been achieved during the transition process. Meanwhile, the country social and political situation have remained fragile due to enduring social crisis and the ongoing tensions in Eastern DRC. Efforts are being implemented by the state to fully eradicate the various armed groups, strengthen the rule of law and to restore of state authority throughout the country.

Market economy development and improvement of the business environment

Promising Economic Development

The Democratic Republic of the Congo economic growth rate reached 8% in 2014. The growth was driven by a dynamic mining and manufacturing industry, agriculture, trade and construction. However the progress, the Congo remained a primary industry country. In recent years, the country economy benefited from a favouring external environment which was characterized by a strong demand and a fairly high prices within the market. The drop in demand and commodity prices caused the country to lose an equivalent amount of more than US \$ 1 billion to US \$ 300 million during the fiscal year 2016. This also led to a drop in the country's exports and foreign currencies reserve as well as to a national budget decrease.

The country's membership into OHADA helped the DRC Government to speed up the economic reforms, in particular shortening administrative deadlines to create a new company, the removal of a bunch of administrative requirements, the administrative costs cut, alleviation of certain taxes and charges. In 2018, the DRC emerged from the economic recession that was caused by a global price fall of the country main export products between 2015 and mid-2017. Economic growth continued to increase reaching 4.1% in 2018, compared to 3.7% in 2017 and 2.4% in 2016. The economic increase was mainly driven by recovery in mining productions and a favourable global prices of copper and cobalt as the demand for the two products revived. The country's fiscal position also improved in 2018 in the context of continued cash-based budget management and improved domestic revenue mobilization. The overall budget surplus of 0.4% of GDP in 2017 increased to 1.3% of GDP in 2018 after three successive years of deficits.

The economic performances are due to increased control over public spending (despite the increase in spending related to the electoral process) and to higher direct tax revenues from the mining sector. However, the amounts of public, social and investment spendings have remained low and insufficient to comply with a more sustained and inclusive pace of growth in medium and long term. The DRC Government has also implemented a series of sector reforms aimed at strengthening governance in natural resources management and improving the business environment. Almost all the contracts signed by the Government granting minings, oil and forestry titles are now made public and available. The DRC is part of

the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and its publishes on a regular basis reports on natural resource revenues under this framework.

In addition, legislation on mining and hydrocarbons has been amended to allow the state to benefit more from the resources exploitation. However, t additional efforts is needed from the Government to systematize competition over the allocation of mining, oil and forestry contracts.

The reforms undertaken to improve the DRC business environment include a public-private partnership laws, the liberalization of the insurance sector and telecommunications (see World Bank Report, Economic Situation of the DRC 2018: 15/04/2019)

DRC new Leadership vision

The new ruling authorities in the DRC are committed to the strict management of the state budget funds through drastic measures, including the fight against corruption. The new Leadership is determined to eradicate serious shortcomings to solve the country's problemes. To fulfill his view of the DRC, the newly elected President is seeking for external support given the fact that the state investments are insufficients. The country is bound to attract the funds from friendly foreign countries. The funds will be used to create new businesses in order to create jobs and reduce outraging unemployment. The new Leadership sees it as a way to get the foreign investors to invest in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Congolese officials are bringing forward a number of reforms to clean up the macroeconomic environment and consolidate peace following the first peaceful and transparent elections held in December 2018 that resumed with a civilized transfer of power ending the country's everlasting political crisis having threatened the country's stability for many decades.

The new Leadership in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is also committed to building a proper business environment for the foreign investors by proposing a coherent and convincing investment code to its dealing partners, and notably by creating free economic zones where firms are not subjected to taxes and are allowed to pay to their workers the wages that fits their budget.

The DRC is a member of OHADA as conferred on the 10/002 Legislative Act published on 11 February 2012. This Legislative Act seeks to improve the country's business environment and eradicate mischiefs such legal and judicial insecurity, corruption, multiplicity of taxes, a troubled land registration process, the deficiencies within the state administration reinforcing irresponsibility and impunity.

The main reforms within DRC after 2010

Congolese officials are bringing forward a number of reforms to clean up the macroeconomic environment and consolidate peace following the first peaceful and transparent elections held in December 2018 that resumed with a civilized transfer of power

ending the country's everlasting political crisis having threatened the country's stability for many decades.

The main economic reforms after 2010 include:

In relation to companies registration

- The overall cost to start a new business in the DRC was cut to US\$ 150
- The drafting of the bill liberalizing public notary
- The required authorization before any economic activity was opened up was repealed and replaced with a declaration of establishment issued by the municipality free of cost
- The process of issuing operational license to firms under category II have been eased and the regulation for granting operational licenses to companies under Category I were eased too.
- The review on the provisions related to the Family Code and children providing openings to married female entrepreneur.
- The establishment of a Trade Register and Credit for Furniture

Access to credit

- The modernization of the Central bank risk center (on first phase)

Taxes collection

- The corporate tax on corporations profits was lowered from 40% to 35%
- The collection of withholding taxes on profits and profits tax is cancelled
- The adoption and promulgation of the law on Value Added Taxes.
- Redundancies on the rights, taxes and royalties from the Central government and the provinces are eliminated
- The procedures under duties recovery, taxes and royalties due to the state were made easier
- The country is resolved to developing, publishing and enforcing a scheduled tax audits

All these reforms have been implemented and their implementation has produced results in some areas while the effects remain slow in others areas.

In 2014, the DRC ranked among the top ten countries in the world having implemented a largest number of reforms according to a Doing Business Report from the World Bank Group. Five reforms were in particular recognized in the following areas: business creation, loans obtaining, taxes payment, protection granted to minority investors and connection to electricity.

Despite the many challenges faced by the service that is in charge of cleaning-up of the business environment hampered with the lack of extension, absence of sanctions and civil servants resistance are being opposed to reforms. The illegal payment after certain services, the difficulties to appropriating the reforms, the lack of technical and management capacities within the civil service, the lack of financial resources, the various reforms already carried out under this process are leaving a negative impact in the country.

Bilateral Cooperation and Cooperation Programs

The first ever political shift in the Democratic republic of Congo following December 2018 elections was an important historical turning point for the country. The newly elected President did not wait to build bridges for bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries and many other partners. Through various trips and tours the President has paid abroad, the DRC is recovering its place within the international cooperation arena. Several key regional Institutions and senior international representatives have paid travel to Kinshasa. The latest visit of a senior delegation from the African Development Bank was used by the DRC President as an opportunity to reiterate His determination to work on bilateral cooperations stating that : "I believe in free trade and I believe in the african continent integration. That's why I value the our country relationship with neighboring countries."

Moreover, quite significant steps are being implemented to confirm the new dynamic of bilateral cooperation in which the country is deeply committed. The country is back to the African Union stage and SADC, there was a reopening of La Maison Schengen in Kinshasa, several bilateral partnership agreements were signed, bilateral cooperation with the European Union and Belgium is reinstated and many more.

The following advocacy for the DRC reintegration into AGOA is an adequate response to the ongoing dynamic over bilateral cooperation and the actions that are made under this plea are part of the movement redrawing bilateral cooperations with many nations. Here's about the case United States of America. It's clear that DRC will secure peace and would continue to boost its economic and social development through bilateral cooperations with the nine neighboring countries and the world.

Cooperation programs having direct or indirect link with entrepreneurship empowerment and business creation are visible in the country, they are many and varied reflecting on the scale of the problems that need to be addressed as well as the size of the country (see Appendix 1)

Improvement in the trade barriers removal and investments

The implementation of a poverty reduction strategy

The following chapter on poverty reduction is part of the three-fold approach to ending conflict: a vision for the medium and long-term development rebuilding the social and economic environment within the country. This strategy is aimed primarily at restoring peace and security within and beyond national borders and restoring the rule of law at one hand, and reviving and consolidating the national economy on basis of the Millennium Development Goals and the ongoing Government Economic Program.

Fighting against poverty, the Congolese state has developed and implemented the poverty reduction strategy that was carried out through specific programs and projects that are expected to shape the future of the DRC in the medium and long term.

Reforms under the judicial system

The judicial system is rehabilitated by the DRC Government. The final version of the justice action-plan has been published and implemented. The action-plan aims at strengthening the judicial system. In spite of the many difficulties it goes through, the DRC Government has begun to implement the following actions fulfilling its commitments:

- the implementation of a sectoral justice policy and priority actions;
- the commerce courts are being implemented in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and everywhere else in the country;
- the DRC's accession to OHADA is finalised and an official signing ceremony was held of the agreement that would allow the launching of the joint monitoring committee under the framework of judicial programs. A secretariat has been established.

It worth remembering that the above actions and reforms had been undertaken in the judicial system with the support of the European Union, UNDP, MONUSCO, the World Bank, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. An operational audit on the judicial system and judicial program framework in the DRC has been carried out.

As the DRC Government made a Declaration of Intent through the country's Justice Minister, a Joint Monitoring Committee related to the Justice Framework Program had been set up aiming to support the Justice Ministry in developing and implementing a sectoral justice policy and priority actions in on its field. Progress are underway. The monitoring committee is made of representatives from the Justice Ministry and many others from the developmental partners. The Congolese Government is pursuing with the implementation of judicial policies.

The fight against corruption

Corruption is an offense severely punishable by fines and imprisonment (Article 149 bis Penal Code Book II). The Democratic Republic of the Congo adopted a code of conduct for the public servants under the 017-2002 3 October 2002 decree-law) and a monitoring body to the professional ethics code (decree 075-2003 from 30 April 2003). The DRC has ratified a Memorandum of Understanding with the Southern African Developemtn Community (SADC, Anti-Corruption, dated 2001).

Since 2001, the country has published and implemented a law against money laundering and terrorist financing (Law No. 04 /and in addition, our country signed the African Union Act on Preventing and Combating Corruption in 2013.).

During a speech delived by President Felix TSHISEKEDI on the occasion of the first edition of Africa anti corruption Day, speaking before foreign ambassadors and the country officials coming from the various institutions, the President was formal regarding the fight against corruption. President Felix TSHISEKEDI has pledged to curb by every means the scourge of corruption having led the country to a nearly 15 billion USD of revenue loss in public treasury.

The new president has also offered a series of newer essential and effective measures to deal with corruption so that the Government credibility is rebuilt as it makes the course for inclusive and sustainable growth. Among those targeted measures, the President committed to :

- give more adequate and consistent resources to the Judicial system to ensure the work is carried professionally and well;
- raise awareness and mobilizing the Congolese on the misdeeds of corruption;
- strengthen the legal and institutional framework fighting against corruption;
- amend the electoral law reforming the election type for a proper and clean election of the Members of Legislative Assemblies, governors and senators;
- at institutional level, to create a Specialized Service called: Coordination for Mentality Change or CCM whose mission is to ensure prevention, awareness and to fight against all kinds of anti-values

To help eradicate outrageous corruption in the DRC, being a major obstacle to trade and investment, the Government has strengthened its strategy that is based on :

- effective strengthening of the judiciary independence;
- the reforms of laws and regulations relating to tax and customs benefits or incentives to match simplification, transparency and systematization tackling corruption;
- the establishment of incentive mechanisms to fight corruption, including those that reward integrity and improve the working conditions for civil servants while subjecting them to controls and sanctions;
- defining a private sector development policy and promoting a business environment that fits;
- pursuing the tax reforms that promote growth and equity, including mechanisms to inform and educate the taxpayers about their rights and duties in tax matters, so that taxation is perceived as a neutral and effective tool for income redistribution as well as equity development;
- strengthening the audit and control mechanisms over the state funds management and expenditures;
- undergo the public procurement reform and a periodic review of public expenditures (RDP), etc.

CONCLUSION

As shown by the data exposed along the second chapter and despite all the unfortunate political events the country have gone through, even when many things have still to be done, the Democratic Republic of Congo has made significant progress in promoting good governance and human rights after it was excluded from AGOA. The country has made enough efforts to overcome its difficulties and to meet the conditions of re-eligibility into the AGOA. It's right to say that collective actions taken by the local and national civil society organizations and pressures from the international community as well as the involvement of regional and continental organizations have brought the DRC back to the right direction.

All the reforms implemented since the Democratic Republic of Congo exclusion from the AGOA have had a greater impact improving the political, judicial, economic, security and human rights situation. In regards to sexual violences, being the immediate cause of the country exclusion from AGOA, the DRC Head of State appointed a Special Representative to fight against sexual violences and whose successful work led to the DRC being removed from the United Nations' blacklist of sexual abuser nations. As to human rights at large, the reforms in place have significantly reduced the intensity of armed conflicts and armed groups' activities what use to be the main driving force behind massive human rights, and especially sexual violence. The reforms also led to the setting up of a national body (CNDH) to constantly monitor those violations. The drafting and passing of laws that promote and protect human rights; the decrease in human rights violations rate nationwide, the ending of arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions along with cruel and ill-treatments during detention; the fresh wave of more freedoms, including the freedom of press and expression, the freedom of assemblies and public demonstrations; the progress made in respect to the child rights and workers rights have had a greater impact shirting the balance to the right direction.

On the other hand, successful elections held on 30 December 2018 and their promising outcomes are also among the positive results of those reforms. The peaceful transfer of power between a civilian democratically elected president and a former military leader is a powerful signal of a new age in the DRC. The President affirmative commitments to work more on the rule of law and human rights protection and promotion with a special attention to the fight against all kinds of gender-based violence and discriminations are more reassuring. It is important to stress out that those elections have led to the historic election of a woman as Speaker of the DRC National Assembly, this was never experienced before in the DRC since gaining independence in 1960.

Taking into account all these objective and good reasons, the DRC deserves and has qualified to be reintegrated into the AGOA. The country's reintegration will be beneficial to both the DRC and the US as well as to all member countries within AGOA. Indeed, the list of marketable products as well as strategic minerals including Cobalt, Coltan, Niobium and many others shows that the DRC provides tremendous business opportunities, a beneficial relationship with the US and the US nationals and strategic interests. The lawful exploitation and exports of minings will benefit both the Congolese and Americans while promoting regional and economic integration.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX1: Cooperation programs started for promoting entrepreneurship and creating companies

1. Youth Employment Program
2. Japanese cooperation
3. Support project for vocational training
4. Investment facility
5. Micro Finance Framework Program
6. BIZ INVEST Program
7. PRO INVEST Program

APPENDIX2: The Various Proposals of Laws Elaborated and Submitted to the Parliament for examination and adoption are

- Draft law on the protection of human rights defenders;
- Draft law decriminalizing press offenses
- Draft law granting right of access to information;
- Anti-Corruption Bill;
- Anti-Terrorism Bill;
- Draft law on the freedom of association of assembly, expression of opinion and public demonstration;
- Bill to revise Law No. 004 of 20 July 2001 on the general provision applicable to non-profit associations and public-service establishments;
- Draft organic law promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous Pygmy peoples;
- Draft organic law promoting and protecting the rights of living persons with disabilities;

APPENDIX3: Cooperation programs with the DRC

PROGRAMS	INSTITUTIONS	OBJET/ OBSERVATIONS
PROYEN (Youth Employment Program)	Ministry of Employment, Labor and Social Welfare	The program benefits from the support of the Congolese government through the Treasury
PROCER (Framework Program for Creating Jobs and Income)	Ministry of Employment, Labor and Social Welfare	The program has the support of the Congolese Government through the Treasury, it will benefit this year from the support of the African Development Bank.

JICA	National Institute of Professional Preparation (Program for entrepreneurship training)	INPP has just signed a partnership agreement with the Japanese Cooperation JICA, FINCA and OPEC for the training of young people in entrepreneurship.
Support Project for Professional Training	Ministry of Education Technical and Professional	Benefits from the support of Belgian Technical Cooperation and works closely with the Federation of the Enterprises of Congo. The program must allow young people, among other things, to start their own business at the end of their studies.
Micro Finance Framework Program	Ministry of Finance	Improving poor people's access to financial services through capacity building of microfinance organizations and improving the quality and availability of information on the risks and performance of these organizations
BizClim - EU Program PRO€INVEST Program		The program improves the business climate through the reform of regulatory frameworks and those of public companies, the development of financial systems and investment potential studies.

APPENDIX 4: List of marketable products in the United States of America under AGOA

N°	PRODUIT	LOCATION	COMMENTS
01	Moringa	Uvira, Fizi and Kongo Central	
02	Caffe	Kalehe, Bandundu, Equator, Bandundu city	

03	Pepper	Kinshasa, Kongo Central	
04	Essential Oils	Kinshasa, Kongo Central	
05	Fertilizers / Bats	Kinshasa, Kongo Central	
06	Peanut butter	Kinshasa	
07	Natural honey	Sud Kivu, Kongo Central, Equator, Bandundu and Kinshasa	
08	Cheese	North Kivu, South Kivu	
09	Natural jam	Kinshasa	
10	Black and green tea	Kinshasa	
11	Wine	Kinshasa	
12	Natural Juice	Kinshasa, South Kivu	
13	Fish and Seafood	Kinshasa, Katanga, Tanganyika, Kongo Central	
14	Wood (Afromozia, acacia, wenge, sappeli, ...)	Kinshasa, Equator, Tshopo ; Former Katanga ; Maniema ;	
14	semi-precious stones	South-Kivu ; Upper Katanga, Lualaba ; North Kivu, Maniema, Lomami, Kasai central ; Kasai oriental, Kinshasa ; Kongo Central	
15	Palm Oil	Kongo Central, Bandundu, Equator, Sankuru ; south Kivu ; Maniema, Kwilu, Kwango, Mai-Ndombe, Oriental Province	
16	Rum	Kwilu ; Kongo Central,	
17	Sugar cane	Kongo Central ; South Kivu ;	
18	Peanuts	RDC	
	Mushroom (tropical species)	RDC	
19	Mushrooms	RDC	
20	Caterpillars and edible insects	RDC	
21	Spices	RDC	
22	Vegetables	RDC	

23	Kaolin	Kinshasa, Kassaï ; bas Congo ; South Kivu	
24	Fruits	RDC	
25	Beef and its derivatives	Est de la RDC ;	
26	Jewelry, necklace and accessory	Kinshasa, Kassaï ; Katanga, South Kivu ; North Kivu	
27	Wangila	Kongo Central	
28	Cereals (rice, sorghum)	South Kivu ; Maniema ; Mongala, North- Kivu	
29	Cassava	RDC	
30	Tannery skins	RDC	
31	Rafias	Kassaï Central, Kassaï oriental ; Kassaï Kwango, Kwilu ; Mai-Ndombe ; Tshopo	
32	Congolese loincloth clothing	RDC	
34	Ores (malachite, ivory, wolframite, Psyloclor, amatisse, cadmium, slate, quartz, marble, emerald, etc...)	RDC	
35	Sunflower	North - Kivu ; South Kivu,	
36	Cacao	North Kivu, Tshopo, Equator, Kongo central	
37	Biscuits	Kinshasa, Sud-Kivu	
38	Congolaise music		
39	Congolese languages		
40	Art object and music		
41	Cinema		
42	Sports and theaters		

APPENDIX 5: List of 24 political prisoners and opinion freed on August 19 2016 by the minister of justice

- Christopher NGOYI MUTAMBA (President of the NGO " Congo Synergy Culture and Development", arrested on January 21, 2015);
- Fred BAUMA (Activist of the LUCHA Citizen Movement, arrested on March 15, 2015)
- Yves MAKWAMBALA (Activist of the FILIMBI Citizen Movement, arrested in May 2015);
- Giresse BONGOMISA NZINGA (student at University of Kinshasa, arrested in March 2015);
- Joël NUMULINDA BOKURU (student at University of Kinshasa, arrested in March 2015);
- Léon NGUWA ((student at University of Kinshasa, arrested in March 2015);
- Junior MAPEKE N'LANDU (Musician close to the FILIMBI movement, arrested in May 2015);
- Jerry OLENGA (Member of FONUS, arrested on November 04, 2015);
- Paulin LODY (Member of FONUS, arrested on November 04, 2015);
- Jean-Marie KALONJI (President of the movement "It is time DRC-fourth way" arrested on December 15, 2015);
- Paulin KIKUKAMA NDJOLOKO (Member of the UDPS, arrested on September 29, 2015)
- Narcissus Juvin KOMBI
- Pascal Byumanine
- Innocent FUMBU
- Saïdi WETAMWAMI HESHIMA
- Gervais SEMUNDA
- RWAMAKUBA
- Nelson KATEMBO KALINDALO
- Jonathan KAMBALE MUHASA
- Hosea KAKULA KILALA
- Jojo SEMIVUMBI
- Hope MUMBERE
- Benu BAHATI
- LONGALE MATESO.

APPENDIX 6: International treaties and sub region reviewed and ratified by the DRC

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: signed and ratified;
- Convention on child rights: signed and ratified;
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: not signed but ratified;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Treatment or Punishment; inhuman or degrading: not signed but ratified;
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: signed and ratified;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: signed and ratified.