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The following are edited excerpts of Jeffrey Gettleman's interview with Joseph Kabila, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Q: Let's start with how things are going. How are you feeling right now?

A: To appreciate how things are going, we have to look back at how things were a couple years ago, 10, 15 years ago, how things were a couple months ago, how things were a couple weeks ago.

I believe we are moving in the right direction. It has us taken so much time, a lot of energy, a lot of resources, a lot of sacrifice, especially on the part of the population. But we are starting to talk of peace, and long term peace.

Q: Tell me about the recent deal that was struck between Congo and Rwanda to flush out the rebel groups. Do you trust the Rwandans?

A: Well, do they trust me? Trust is a very big word, especially when you're talking of countries or nations. Countries and nations - it's all a matter of interests.

Our interests? To have a peaceful neighbor, a neighbor that respects our territorial integrity, a neighbor that respects our independence, and of course a neighbor we can do business with. What are Rwanda's interests in the Congo? I like to believe that they are they same. But if there is a hidden agenda, and Rwanda's interest is more or less controlling the mining concessions and all that, illegally, and if they have a hand in each and everything that goes on in North and South Kivu, then we're still a long way from trust. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt, once again, probably for the last time.

Q: What's going to happen to Laurent Nkunda (the Congolese rebel general who was arrested by Rwandan troops in January)? I've heard he may come back to Congo as a general. Are you ok with that?

A: Well, I'm not ok with a lot of things. But there are things that you have to live with. But one of those is not the fact that Nkunda is going to come back and go back into the army. No, that's out of the question. The Congolese people could like to have an answer to what or why Nkunda did all that he has done. After all, we've lost so many years because of his adventures and we'd like to have an answer. If or when he comes back, or should I say when, we definitely want to have answers and the best way to get answers is through the justice system. What happens next, that's another issue.

Q: So, what does that mean? Some type of truth and reconciliation commission?

A: We still don't have that. But we might also have the justice system come in first and then truth and reconciliation commission following later. But we don't want to take any actions or measures that will push us back to where we were yesterday or the day before that. So, we play that balancing act.

Q: What does that mean? Will Nkunda be sent back to Congo and put on trial?



A: Definitely. He's going to come back. We will definitely put him on trial in order to have answers to a lot of questions. And then, we'll see how long that process is going to take.

Q: You think the Rwandans will really give him up?

A: Well, let's wait and see. I do believe that in good faith they will do that – or they should do that.

Q: Did you start the recent fighting with Nkunda?

A: I'm not a war monger. And I'm not a pacifist either. But I like peace. So, it's out of the question that we ordered an offensive against Nkunda. No, no, we didn't have any reasons to do that.

Q: Why did the army do so poorly against him? What's the problem with the military here?

A: I don't think the army did so badly against him. There are two issues we have to keep in mind. The Congo is still building its institutions, and that includes the security institutions. Secondly, and this is what the world needs to know, the Congo has virtually been under an arms embargo for so long. On one hand, we have the obligation to protect and defend our country. We are doing that and we will continue to do that. But on the other hand, you have these gentlemen sitting somewhere in Brussels and elsewhere who are basically tying our hands behind our backs.

Q: Was letting in the Rwandans a risk?

A: In life, you always have to take a risk. Breathing is a risk. When you eat, you might choke on your food. That's a risk. This was a risk we had to take in order to do away with a problem that has been affecting the population over the last 15 years

Q: Were you pressured by the U.S. or others?

A: No, nobody. You might be surprised to know they were also caught off guard.

Q: How do you feel about MONUC (the United Nations 17,000-strong peacekeeping mission in Congo)?

A: How do I feel about MONUC? It has been successful in some areas, like Ituri. Now, we have to ask ourselves the question: is it enough - especially after what we witnessed after the last round of fighting? How useful was MONUC, which was deployed on the ground everywhere? How useful was it - not to protect the Congolese army, no, we don't need the protection of MONUC, but to protect the local population? Of course, there were massacres that occurred in Kiwanja and elsewhere, under their nose. There is a big question mark. We have to agree MONUC will definitely one day leave. When is that? Also a big question mark.

Q: Did you feel let down by what happened?

A: Not only me, the Congolese population felt let down. MONUC made promises and had obligations and they did not meet those obligations and they did not respect those promises.



Q: What type of obligations and promises?

A: Obligations to protect the population. Promises to make sure that the cease fire was not broken. They didn't do that.

Q: So much of Congo is held hostage by what happens in the east. Is that making it hard for you to do other things?

A: Very painful, very painful. The impression you get from the world's media is that the whole of Congo is burning, or was burning. No, we have 145 territories in this country and out of those, you have 4 or 5 that were problematic. But it's true that 80 percent of my time, instead of working on development issues, was spent on working on how to resolve the problems in North and South Kivu. How do you explain that? The suffering of the people, you can't withstand that.

Q: Tell me a little bit about Congo's economic woes. How bad is it?

A: It's very bad on us. Sixty percent of our revenues were from the mining operations. The mining sector has been hit hard - very, very hard. We believe we have other sectors to develop and we can develop them fast. Like agriculture. We used to be one of the biggest producers of coffee, of cacao, we used to have huge rubber plantations. We have to revive those and those efforts are underway. In the towns in the Congo, the population is very, very young. It's almost a time bomb. You have to make sure those young men and young women are employed; otherwise you'll have social upheaval.

Q: What about this \$9 billion development deal with the Chinese?

A: I don't understand the resistance we've encountered. What is the Chinese deal? We said we had five priorities: infrastructure; health; education; water and electricity; and housing. Now, how do we deal with these priorities? We need money, a lot of money. Not a 100 million U.S. dollars from the World Bank or 300 from the IMF [International Monetary Fund]. No, a lot of money, and especially that we're still servicing a debt of close to 12 billion dollars, and it's 50 to 60 million U.S. dollars per month, which is huge. You give me 50 million dollars each month for the social sector and we move forward. Anyway, that's another chapter. But we said: so, we have these priorities, and we talked to everybody. Americans, do you have the money? No, not for now. The European Union, do you have three or four billion for these priorities? No, we have our own priorities. Then we said: why not talk to other people, the Chinese? So we said, do you have the money? And they said, well, we can discuss. So we discussed.

Q: Do you resent the West now complaining about this deal?

A: Well, I don't understand why they said don't sign these deals. Probably because a lot of ignorance, ignorance of how difficult our situation is. Of course, when you sit in Washington or you sit in New York, you believe the whole world is like Washington or New York. But people are suffering. What revolted me was the fact that there was resistance to this agreement and there was no counter proposal.

Q: You clearly have an overwhelming job. You have security problems. Your country is massive. Do you ever feel overwhelmed?

A: Well, sometimes I feel overwhelmed. But there are some of us who were born to lead good lives, to do all the things anybody could want to do, to live the dream. But there are those who are born probably just to suffer and bring about the necessary change so the next generation will have a better future. It is overwhelming, but we're trying to deal with the issues one by one. Of course, we don't have time on our hands. The main problem of security - we've dealt with



that. The other issue is development. And of course, you have corruption and the administration which is not working, it's not fluid, and you have partners who don't understand the full challenges.

Q: What about justice? There have been a lot of complaints about Jean Marie Bosco (a former rebel general accused of war crimes who was recently welcomed into the Congolese army). Do you want to turn Bosco over to the International Criminal Court?

A: There is no other country in Africa that has cooperated with the ICC like Congo. Out of the four people at the ICC, four are Congolese. That shows you how cooperative we've been. But you also have to be pragmatic. And realistic. Justice that will bring out war, turmoil, violence, suffering and all that, I believe we should say: let's wait, let's do away with this for the time being. For me, the priority right now is peace.

Q: So, for Bosco, what exactly does that mean?

A: Bosco has been so cooperative in bringing about the necessary change that has brought about peace that we need to give him the benefits, of what we say in French, la doubt, the benefit of the doubt. That's what we're doing. We're watching. We're monitoring him. We haven't forgotten that he's wanted by the justice system. But at the same time, we're telling the justice system that you're not going to be in place in the Congo if and when war breaks out.

Q: And, again, with Nkunda?

A: There's no mandate for the time being against Nkunda.

Q: So, in the end, will he be punished?

A: Whoever committed crimes should be punished and basically recognize that they did commit crimes, because the healing process starts from there, that recognition, that what we did was bad, and that itself is basically a guarantee that that individual will not repeat. And up until now, that has not been done.

Q: With Nkunda?

A: Yes. And I believe if he is as intelligent as everyone thinks he is, he might start from there, asking for the people, especially the people of North and South Kivu, to forgive him, and to say, well, what he did was very bad. People don't know how far, how deep that goes into the heart of someone who has lost a dear one. That in itself is the beginning of a healing process.

Q: What do you think about Africom (the new American military Africa command)? Any interest in hosting a base here?

A: Creating a base in the Congo is out of the question. We don't believe the Congo should be the base for anybody or any power, not at all. But we do have a plan for the American government to train some of our troops.



Q: What do you think of Obama?

A: What do I think of Obama? I don't know what he thinks of me. So I won't have anything to say about him. But I believe there is a lot of hope, in Africa, of course, but basically the world over, that America will do what it supposed to do.

Q: What do you do for fun? To blow of steam?

A: I'm a collector of precession equipment. I collect motorcycles. Old motorcycles. New motorcycles. I have 4, 5, 6.

Q: Your favorite?

A: A Ducati (an expensive Italian bike)

Q: Where do you ride?

A: In Kinshasa, not in the city but in alleys.

Q: Do you work out?

A: I used to work out. I believe it has helped me reduce tension. But I don't have time anymore. I'm gaining a lot of weight. (Pats his belly) I have to shed 10 kgs.

Q: Is it true you don't smoke or drink?

A: I don't smoke. I try to drink a bit of wine, when I'm socializing, which is not often, but, well, you also don't want to look like you're coming from the planet Mars.

Q: Do you worry about your own security after what happened to your father? (Laurent Desire Kabila, Congo's last president, was assassinated in 2001.)

A: Of course, there is always that question mark, what next? But no, it doesn't come to my mind, and in any case, you can only live once. And you only die once, I hope, for those who don't believe in reincarnation, like myself (laughs). Death, it's there, always with us, When does it strike? A question mark.

Q: Which suits you better, being a soldier or being president?

A: Well, I don't know. I believe you should ask my mother that question. But it's true that I became a soldier, an officer, well, because I volunteered. But I became a president, especially from 2001, because of those tragic circumstances. But you learn to live with the situation that you're put in.



Q: Do you have the right people to help you?

A: (Long pause) Mobutu led this country for over 37 years. He created a political class and he created a mentality and we haven't done away with that. The old ways are bad - corruption, misrule, mismanagement and all that. Our biggest mistake is that we have not found enough time to train and form our own cadres. You don't need a thousand people to transform a country. No, you need 3, 4, 10, 15 people with the necessary convictions, determined and resolute. Do I have those 15 people? Probably 5, 6, 7, not yet 15.

Q: What do you consider your top accomplishments?

A: To put the Congo back on the world map. You know, when we were still organizing our own resistance in 1995, 96, and you went through Zambia and people would recognize you that you were from at that time Zaire, people could treat you with so much disrespect, that me I couldn't take it. "Ah, Zairois." Zairois - it was like an insult. Just like saying "American" in Kandahar (laughs). So, now, today when you go to Zambia, the population says "Ah, he's from the Congo! He's from President Kabila's country!"

We've given back the Congolese people that respect and self respect. To me, that's the beginning of nation building and the beginning of patriotism itself. And we've made sure that democracy becomes reality in the Congo. Nobody had done that since independence. And maybe the most important thing is the hope that we've given to the Congolese people, hope that there is tomorrow, that there's something that we call tomorrow and that they're not going to die today and that there is a better tomorrow, that tomorrow will be better than today.

Q: Do you ever get really angry?

A: No, I never get angry, and people say it's not good. That I should get angry and that I should be boxing people. It's very difficult to get me angry.

Q: Nkunda probably got you close.

A: Very close. But in the Congo, in order to move forward and in order really to make headway, you need to have a cool head, a very cool, very calm head.

Q: When you see people wearing shirts with your face on it, what do you think? Do you laugh? Do you think it's cool? Are you embarrassed?

A: A mixture of the three. (Laughs) I always like low key events, nothing ostentatious. But in Africa, and especially in the Congo, it's a way of showing affection. Most of these were distributed during the campaign. We were forced to do that. Otherwise we were going to lose.

Q: What would you want the world to know about Congo?

A: I believe the world is very much aware of what's going on in the Congo. But it has been aware of the negatives issues in the Congo, the war, the rape, the massacres and all that. But what the world also needs to know is that the Congo is a strategic country on this continent. People can't pretend to develop all these other countries without using the Congo as the true locomotive and engine. And the Congo is open to talk and do business with everybody.



We have our mistakes, like any other country. We have our challenges, huge challenges. But a democracy has now got roots in the Congo, and that in itself is a factor for stability, and long term stability. Had we not had democratic elections in this country, the issue of Nkunda and all these other rebellions could have gotten out of hand. But it is because the people are so much determined to defend their democracy that this whole thing is going to burn like a fire without any fuel on it.

Q: Since you brought it up, tell me what happened with the massacres in Bas Congo. What do you have to say about that? (Human rights groups have accused Mr. Kabila's security forces of killing dozens of unarmed civilian demonstrators in Bas Congo area in 2007.)

A: We should not mistake people and insurrection. Those are two different things. We've had riots in the Congo, but people have never been shot dead. No. What happened in Bas Congo was an insurrection, a secessionist movement, and it wasn't the first time they had done that. They took weapons and killed some seven policemen and soldiers, and the situation was basically getting out of hand. We had to deal with it. Were there mistakes that were made? Yes.

Q: Like what?

A: Like what? We arrested some policemen who basically mis-conducted themselves and shot willingly at the population. They are in prison and they have been condemned. Two cases of rape, and they have been condemned to life in prison. So mistakes were made. And we dealt with those. But at the same time, that insurrection movement could not be allowed to thrive. Otherwise it was the whole country that was going to boom, to explode.

Q: The Congo is growing on me. I hope it gets what it deserves.

A: The Congo deserves more. The Congolese people deserve more, more than just fighting, than just war, than just violation of human rights. I believe this is the time for us to make that particular change and we're going to do it. Is the world ready to see a strong Congo? I hope so. It's another question mark. Because so many people are afraid, especially in this region. But we're saying that the Congo is a giant, a gentle giant. We are a huge nation but a very gentle giant, determined to live in peace with all its neighbors.