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Incumbent Declared Winner in Congo Vote

By Stephanie McCrummen

KINSHASA, Congo — Incumbent Joseph Kabila was on Wednesday declared the winner of Congo's first presidential elections in more than 40 years, as the crumbling boulevards of the capital remained calm.

The announcement came during a week of rising tensions and as dozens of U.N. tanks patrolled the streets. On Tuesday, supporters of Kabila's rival, Jean-Pierre Bemba, essentially declared their candidate president, accusing the election commission and other countries of an "electoral holdup."

Bemba, a former rebel leader, has wide support in Kinshasa and a personal guard of an estimated 1,000 soldiers who had refused to evacuate to the edges of the city.

By sundown Wednesday, many Congolese were expressing fear that the historic vote would end in a street brawl. Business owners chained their doors early, streets were unusually empty, and some families boarded ferries bound for Brazzaville, in neighboring Congo Republic across the vast Congo River.

But the sort of violence that killed at least 23 people after the first round of voting on July 30, and that people endured during a decade of civil war, did not materialize.

"We're fed up with the fighting," said Charles Tumba, a Bemba supporter sitting outside a house lacking electricity and running water most of the time. "Basically, everybody is expecting a change in the country. But let's wait and see."

Some international election observers reported irregularities but said none were significant enough to alter the results.

A massive logistical effort had gone into the election in Congo, a mostly roadless country the size of Western Europe with a population of more than 62 million. Foreign donors poured in \$450 million to support the vote, which one Western aid official deemed perhaps one of the "most complicated processes in the history of democracy."

The United Nations deployed 17,500 troops, the largest peacekeeping force in the world. Election workers registered more than 25 million voters, many of whom walked miles to cast paper ballots that had to be trucked, biked, canoed or hiked to one of thousands of counting centers across the country. And because there was a runoff, it was done twice.

Kabila, who took power after his father, Laurent Kabila, was assassinated in 2001, faces the challenge of satisfying the high expectations of the electorate, including the 42

percent who voted for Bemba, in a country with more than 200 ethnic groups and at least that many political parties.

"It's not enough just to vote," said Christophe Lutundula, an opposition lawmaker who received death threats after he wrote a report examining wartime mining contracts. Kabila "has to manage his victory. And there has not been much progress in the maturing of the political culture, and that's what worries me most. It is effectively a cultural war to change things in this country."

Kabila takes charge of a country still imbued with the legacy of its longtime dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, who looted billions from the government during his 32-year rule. The violence, disease and famine accompanying the civil war that followed left more than 4 million people dead.

Several former rebel leaders accused of war crimes now hold high-ranking positions in the national army, and militias still terrorize people in the east, taking over farms and national parks. Kabila also faces a population desperate for decent jobs, as unemployment hovers around 80 percent.

Many here say they hope a new constitution, adopted last year, will provide some framework for reforms. The document provides for the creation of provincial legislatures, for example, that in theory will decentralize state power, allowing provinces to retain 40 percent of revenue for local projects.

"People have learned a lot from this process," the aid official said. "And it has created a whole cadre of people who understand what it means to be in the weeds of democracy."

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