

***Kinshasa, DR Congo, December 30 (Infosplusgabon) - Polling centres opened in the cobalt-rich Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Sunday in a landmark vote to usher President Joseph Kabila out of power and to possibly restore peace to restive regions in the country's Eastern region, which has largely been excluded from the vote.***

Election protests erupted in Beni, a city in northeastern DRC, close to the Ituri forest, on Sunday as voters streamed in other cities including Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, neighbouring Rwanda.

Election observers waited outside polling stations for hours before allowing the first stream of voters, witnesses said. Political party poll agents were also frustrated at the poll centres where they were informed that entry to the polling rooms would be based on a rotation formula.

The Electoral Commission (CENI) hailed the opening of the poll centres in a tweet and called for a peaceful vote. The electoral body said Sunday's vote should reflect the voice of the Congolese people.

"The long awaited day has finally arrived. The history of the DRC will be written based on the choices we make today," CENI stated. "Let us all vote in peace...so our voices can count, rain or no rain, let us all vote in peace."

The election preparations have been marred by logistical nightmares. At least 80% of the poll materials in the capital, Kinshasa, were destroyed by an inferno, forcing the postponement of the vote.

A cargo plane carrying poll materials to the provinces also crashed during the campaign period. Some election observers say the government declined an offer for logistical help from the UN.

There is no voting taking place in at least four regions in the country's opposition strongholds in the Eastern zone, with at least 1.5 million votes put on hold until March. The authorities cite an Ebola Disease outbreak but critics have slammed the move as a ploy to exclude opposition voices from the crucial vote.

In Butembo, Beni and Yumbi, the areas excluded from the election, tension remains high and church services took place on Saturday instead of Sunday to avoid reprisals because of the vote.

At the start of the vote, the Congolese social media users took on the CENI officials to ensure democracy wins in the final analysis. “It is up to you to win and reign democracy,” said Didier Kahungu. “It is not the ones who vote but the one who counts the vote.”

The election in the DRC is a watershed moment because it would be one of the few moments in the country’s history when power transition would take place.

President Kabila is not standing in the election but he has not ruled out the possibility of making another attempt at the Presidency at the end of the current transition.

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