



## COMMENTARY

### BALANCING ACT

#### *An insider's view of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue*

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On many levels the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) should be, and has been, criticized by various groups inside and outside of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After reading the feature article on this topic (ASR 12.3, Delegates, Dialogue and Desperadoes), the criticism of the ICD seemed unbalanced and partially premised upon misconceptions and misinformation. The aim, therefore, of this commentary is to shed some light on the ICD process from the point of view of someone who was intimately connected with the ICD process for two years.

The previous article focused on the failure of the ICD, but there were successes that had been achieved. These successes were achieved despite the various hardships faced by Sir Ketumile Masire, from the very onset of his appointment as facilitator. Such hardships included the non-arrival of promised donor contributions. The first contribution arrived in June 2000; six months after Sir Masire's appointment. At Sun City, the Commissions on Humanitarian Development, Reconciliation, and Economic Development had all completed their mandated work and produced resolutions that were meaningful. It was never going to be easy to get agreement on the military structure and the new political dispensation.

The Addis Ababa meeting was a failure on many levels. It had very little chance of ever being a success for several important reasons.

First, the RCD and MLC were anxious

about the date on which to hold the ICD after the preparatory meeting in Gaborone. Their uncertainty was due to the fact that they did not want the process to lose momentum and were worried about Joseph Kabila's commitment to the real negotiations. Joseph Kabila was happy to allow the ICD to happen in the distant future because he was busy trying to consolidate his power internally in the DRC and internationally. Hence, the calls by the RCD and MLC for immediate negotiations. In the three weeks following the Gaborone meeting, the RCD pushed for the ICD to be hosted urgently.

Second, the RCD and MLC were satisfied with the choice of South Africa for the ICD, but the DRC government delegation was unwilling to negotiate on this matter. Addis Ababa was chosen at the insistence of the DRC government delegation. They (the DRC government) had lost their negotiation on the timeframe and were unwilling to give in on the venue. Additionally, any decisions taken by the DRC government had to be confirmed via phone calls to Kinshasa and then to Harare and back to Gaborone. President Robert Mugabe was not willing to allow the Congolese to hold their dialogue in South Africa at the time. The South African government has a close relationship with Rwanda, which backs the RCD, and there was thus fear that this might play an important role in the balance of the negotiations at that stage.

Financial difficulties were a real concern at the time and it is understandable that six weeks is hardly sufficient time to organize a conference of this magnitude.

The DRC government never had any real intention of ever entering into negotiations at Addis Ababa. From day one, they employed stalling tactics and were unwilling to negotiate or discuss even the smallest issues. Suggestions had been made prior to the meeting in Addis Ababa that the facilitator should postpone the meeting, but Sir Masire did not wish to appear to be failing, or to be favouring, the DRC government position. Several EU officials spent their days garnering support for the 'anti-Masire' campaign while in the corridors of the Addis Ababa meeting, instead of pressuring the Congolese government to negotiate.

The situation in the DRC is well known for its rumour-mongering, and the ICD and Sir Ketumile Masire were certainly victims of this. At the same time, the Congolese can hardly be blamed for their fixation with rumours. If there is a place where something outrageously unbelievable can happen, that place is the DRC. The use of rumours within the DRC and by the Congolese has often been employed as a political tactic. One such rumour that spread wildly related to the Commissioners appointed by the Office of the Facilitator to chair the five commissions at the ICD. It was rumoured that the Commissioners each received \$60,000 for their work. However, the real amount paid was only \$15,000 and this was only issued after their work was completed. While \$15,000 is not a small amount, it must also be understood in the context of the calibre of people being recruited. Their experience, credibility, knowledge on the respective commissions, the time they were expected to take leave from their current posts and obligations, and the uncertainty of how long the process might take should all be taken into account. Additionally, these people were appointed prior to the Addis Ababa meeting, and not after, as the previous ASR article suggests.

In relation to the Commissioners, there were several calls by Congolese to employ well-educated Congolese to head the commissions.

However, the practicality of this must be questioned on several levels. First, educated Congolese that have no particular political affiliation are difficult to find. The Commissioners needed to be impartial and knowledgeable about the issues at hand at all times. Second, these calls by the Congolese provided a method for them to stall the talks and to find a means to bribe particular people who may have held these key positions at the ICD.

It is also important to be clear about the Congolese dissatisfaction with Sir Masire as a neutral facilitator. In January 2000, Sir Ketumile Masire met with Laurent Kabila in New York. At this initial meeting, Laurent Kabila told Sir Ketumile Masire that he would pay him \$1 million if he could guarantee that he was selected as interim president of the transitional arrangement to emerge from the ICD. Sir Masire explained to Laurent Kabila that he could not accept his money and could not guarantee positions to any Congolese because this was a choice to be made collectively by the Congolese delegates to the ICD. It was this particular event that launched the campaign by the DRC government against Sir Masire. When the Pretoria Agreements were signed in March 2003, several Congolese officials apologized to Sir Masire for not supporting him after Sun City and recognized his dedication and neutrality to the process. Congolese dissatisfaction with the facilitator had nothing to do with him but with a few of his advisors who represented 'proxy interests'. Several Congolese had called for resignation of these officials at Sun City.

The choice of civil society leaders may have involved some process flaws. However, the selection was well intentioned, and aimed to give civil society leaders throughout the country a democratic chance of becoming part of the ICD. It was aimed at creating a buy-in process for the people of the ICD. However, the DRC is one of the few places in the world where you can be a soldier in the morning, a politician in the afternoon and a civil society leader by the evening. In other words, clearly understanding which roles people are undertaking is often difficult and the aim of the dialogue for many Congolese was to create a path for their future careers.

Unfortunately for Sir Masire, the international community tended to play a divisive and sinister role, rather than a constructive one. South Africa was of great assistance to the facilitator and understood these sinister elements from abroad. At the same time, South Africa also had its own interests to advance, such as NEPAD. Sir Masire was effectively sidelined after the Sun City meeting, and credit should be given to President Mbeki for his commitment

to peace in the DRC. However, credit should also be given to Sir Masire for the foundations he laid that allow the process to evolve toward the points addressed at Sun City. The UN has now stepped in, but at many points the UN was non-existent in the process and when Sir Masire needed someone who could offer a carrot and a stick neither the UN, OAU, SADC nor the big guns of the international community were there to assist.