



**AFRICAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
TO THE 15 MARCH 2026 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN
THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Brazzaville, 17 March 2026

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Congo, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), His Excellency Mr. Mahamoud Ali YOUSSEF, upon the recommendation of the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), H.E. Ambassador Bankole ADEOYE, deployed an African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM), from 07 to 19 March 2026, in order to observe and duly report on the conduct of the electoral process in the country and provide constructive recommendations.

The Mission is led by H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo, former President of the Republic of Ghana. It comprises thirty-four (34) short-term observers, from twenty (20) member states, including ambassadors accredited to the African Union, members of the Pan African Parliament, officials of elections management bodies and members of African civil society organisations.

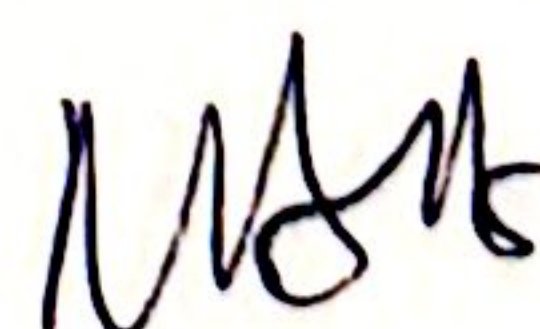
The AUEOM assessed the electoral process in line with the legal framework of the Republic of Congo and relevant African Union and international standards.

The Mission deployed its observers across thirteen (13) out of fifteen (15) Departments, namely: Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, Bouenza, Cuvette, Cuvette-Ouest, Djoué-Léfini, Kouilou, Lékoumou, Niari, Nkényi-Alima, Plateaux, Pool, and Sangha.

During its stay, the Mission observed the final phase of the electoral campaign, Election Day proceedings, and the immediate post-election environment. It also held consultations with key national stakeholders, enabling it to carry out its mandate in an independent, impartial, and objective manner.

II. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The presidential election took place in a generally calm and orderly political environment, centred around policy debates between the ruling party and the opposition.



This presidential election marks the eighth election in the Republic of Congo since its independence and the sixth since the transition to a multiparty system. It is held within a context shaped by constitutional and legal reforms, notably the 2015 constitutional referendum which removed the presidential age limit of seventy (70) years.

Seven (7) candidates contested the election, including the incumbent President, H.E. Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Congolese Labour Party, and six (6) other opponents, namely: Joseph KIGNOUMBI KIA MBOUNGOU of La Chaîne; Destin GAVET of the Republican Movement; Anguios NGANGUIA ENGAMBE of the Party for Action of the Republic, and the following independent candidates: Uphrem DAVE MAFOULA, Vivien Romain MANANGA, and Zinga Mabio MAVOUNGOU.

Nomination files were submitted to the General Directorate of Elections (DGE), which, after consideration, published the provisional list of candidates on 12 February 2026. The final list of candidates was validated by the Constitutional Court on 20 February 2026.

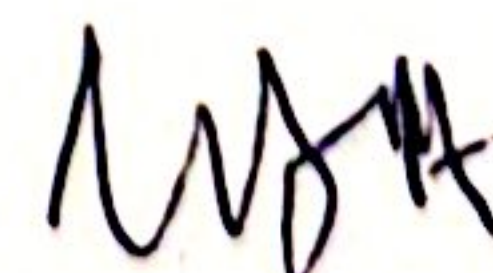
Filing for nomination took place from 23 January to 13 February 2026, at midnight.

Some opposition actors expressed concerns and mistrust in the process, including limitations in the reform to justify their non-participation in the process. They specifically stated the biometric revision of voters' register, the dissolution of the Independent National Electoral Commission, and the failure of the Ministry of the Interior to withdraw from organizing the elections. This includes the parliamentary opposition formed by the Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS) and the Union of Democrats and Humanists (UDH)-Yuki.

In addition, segments of civil society called for a more inclusive dialogue to overcome all divisions and to strengthen participation in the electoral process.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Mission conducted its assessment in accordance with relevant international instruments governing democratic elections and the National Legal Framework (CLN), among other provisions.



IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The President of the Republic is elected by direct universal suffrage, through a single-member constituency, for a term of five years, renewable twice. A candidate must obtain absolute majority of the votes cast, in line with Articles 65 and 67 of the Constitution.

If no candidate obtains an absolute majority in the first round, a second round of voting shall be held twenty-one (21) days after the Constitutional Court announces the final results of the first round.

The two candidates who received the highest number of valid votes cast in the first round are automatically qualified to compete in the second round. The winner is declared elected. q

Eligibility criteria include, a minimum age of thirty (30) years, pursuant to Article 66 of the Constitution. Candidates must also be Congolese nationals by birth, enjoy their civil and political rights, and be in good physical and mental health, as certified by a sworn panel of three (3) physicians appointed by the Constitutional Court; be of good moral character and demonstrate at least eight (8) years of professional experience.

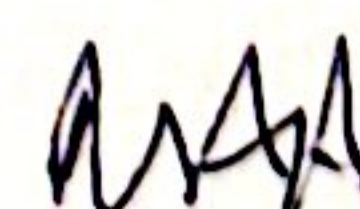
V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The electoral process is administered by several key institutions, including the: the President of the Republic; the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralisation; the Independent National Electoral Commission; the General Directorate of Electoral Affairs; the Constitutional Court; and the High Council for Freedom of Communication.

Each of these institutions plays a role at a specific stage of the electoral process, in accordance with the legal framework.

- *The President of the Republic:*

He is the Head of State and, through presidential decrees, sets the date of the election, appoints members of the General Electoral Office (OGE),



and convenes the electoral college, among other duties. This makes him, a key player in the national political and electoral system.

- ***The Ministry of the Interior and Decentralisation (MID):***

It plays a significant role in election preparation, particularly through decentralised state bodies that contribute to the smooth conduct of electoral processes within their respective areas. It is involved in managing voters' registry, receiving candidate applications, procuring and distributing election materials, and coordinating the election logistics.

The General Directorate of Electoral Affairs (DGAE), under the authority of the Minister, plays a critical operational role in these activities. The DGAE is a technical agency of the ministry in charge of operational and logistical tasks of the electoral process, establishing voters' registry, preparing voting materials, and organising training for election officials.

- ***The Independent National Electoral Commission (CNEI)***

The CNEI was established by Electoral Law No. 1-2016 of 23 January 2016, which amended and supplemented some provisions of the 2001 Electoral Law. It replaces the former National Commission for the Organisation of Elections (CONEL), whose independence was deemed insufficient.

The CNEI has statutory status and its financial autonomy guaranteed by a specific public budget line. The CNEI is made up of representatives from political parties (presidential majority, opposition, centrist parties) and the civil society.

It validates voters' registry; organises and monitors the conduct of elections' campaign; coordinates election's logistics (polling stations, election materials); collects and centralises results after the vote; and submits them to the Minister of the Interior and the Constitutional Court.

The presidential election is organised based on the national voters' registry, which was revised from 1 September through 30 October 2025.

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This revision resulted in an increase in the number of registered voters from **two million eight hundred thousand (2,800,000) to three million two hundred four thousand fifty-four (3,204,054)**. This represents fourteen point four-three percent (14.43% of new registered voters).

These voters are **distributed across three thousand six hundred and twenty (3,620) polling stations**. This electoral breakdown is governed by Electoral Law No. 1-2016 and its related amendments.

- ***The Higher Council for Freedom of Communication (CSLC),***

The new Article 6 of Organic Law No. 27-2022 of 29 June 2022, amends and supplements some provisions of the Organic Law No. 4-2003 of 18 January 2003, relating to the Council's mission, organisation, composition, and operation.

The Council ensures equal access to public media for candidates, parties, and coalitions running for the election, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the electoral law.

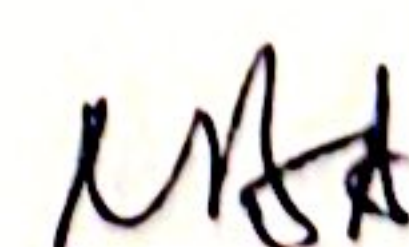
The Mission notes with satisfaction that, these General Electoral Office (OGE) have fulfilled their mandates with diligence and promptness.

- ***The Constitutional Court:***

It is governed by Articles 163 to 179 of Title VIII of the Constitution and by the Organic Law No. 28-2018 of 7 August 2018, on its organisation and functioning. Its members are appointed for a non-renewable term of nine (9) years as follows: Three (3) are appointed by the President of the Republic, three (3) by the Speaker of the National Assembly, and three (3) by the President of the Senate.

All members are appointed by presidential decree and enjoy security of tenure during their term, a measure intended to safeguard their independence; this independence is further reinforced by statutory immunity for actions carried out in the performance of their duties..

They receive and resolve election disputes and announce the final results of the vote. Their decisions have the force of *res judicata*—binding *erga omnes* and are not subject to any form of appeal.



VI. CIVIC AND VOTER EDUCATION

Electoral civic education is one of the hallmarks of inclusive participatory democracy.

Congolese civil society reports that they have been unable to carry out this work as in the past. However, the support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was highlighted by the stakeholders interviewed.

The involvement of the Ministry of Civic Education also helped to further popularise the national citizenship awareness campaign during election period, with the participation of neighbouring chiefs, administrative authorities, and civil society leaders.

VII. MISSION'S ACTIVITIES

The Mission met with the following individuals and institutions:

- *The President of the Republic,*
- *The CNEI*
- *The candidates*
- *Civil society organizations*
- *Other international election observation missions from the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF).*

VIII. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Campaign took place from 28 February to 13 March 2026, in line with Article 1, Paragraph 2, of Decree No. 225/MID-CAB of 24 February 2026. However, the Mission noted that it was suspended from 11 March to midnight on 12 March to facilitate the supervision of early voting by the National Defense and Security Forces (FDSN).

The Mission noted that election's campaign took place without incident, in a climate of calm, and without hate speech or violence in the political arena. This reflects a commendable level of political maturity among the candidates.

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Furthermore, the Mission noted that the Republic of Congo funded the electoral process from the State Budget. However, no public funding for parties, coalitions, and candidates running for the election.

IX. ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION

Overall, the Mission covered three hundred and twenty-nine (329) polling stations, sixty-two percent (62%) located in urban areas, twenty percent (20%) in peri-urban areas, and eighteen percent (18%) in rural areas.

The Mission's thirty-four (34) observers were divided into sixteen (16) teams, deployed across thirteen (13) of the fifteen (15) Departments of the country.

They observed the opening, conduct, and closing of the voting, followed by the counting of ballots, in order to assess their compliance with international standards and the relevant National Legal Framework.

(a) Opening of Polling

According to Article 80 of the Law, polling stations generally open at seven (7) a.m. and close at five (5) p.m. Out of the sixteen (16) polling stations, forty-five percent (45%) opened late, with some delays due to the late delivery of voting materials and/or election staff. In twelve (12) seventy-five percent (75%) of the polling stations visited, the delay exceeded thirty (30) minutes.

The Mission noted that sufficient election materials were delivered in all the polling stations visited and that polling station officials were professional.

The National Defense and Security Forces were visibly present everywhere, acting professionally and without interfering in the electoral process.

Priority was given to voters with special needs, the elderly, and expectant and nursing mothers. Assistance was also provided to voters who required such support. They were assisted by a person of their choice or a polling station official.

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Party and candidates' agents, as well as deployed national and international observers were present, carried out their duties without any interference.

(b)Voting process

The majority of election staff assisted voters with disabilities, as well as elderly and expectant or nursing mothers, in forty-six percent (46%) of the cases at the polling stations visited. Voting went on uninterrupted at the observed polling stations.

Party and candidates' agents, also carried out their duties without interference.

The election staff demonstrated a good understanding of voting procedures.

Ballot boxes were sealed in eighty-eight percent (88%) of the polling stations covered by the Mission.

In ninety-nine percent (99%) of the polling stations visited, voters were required to present valid identification documents, which were duly verified by polling officials. Voter's finger was also marked with indelible ink.

Furthermore, there was high representation of women and youth were as voters, election staff, as well as party and candidates' agents.

Voter turnout varied from one polling station to another. It was generally higher in the afternoon.

Furthermore, the Mission noted that since Election Day, there have been disruptions to the internet and telephone networks. This has impacted the Mission's ability to operate optimally.

Overall, the Mission's observers were able to carry out their duties freely and without interference.

(c)Closing and Vote Counting

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As previously noted, the legal closing time is set at 5:00 p.m., in accordance with the provisions of Article 97 of Law No. 1-2016 of 23 January 2016.

However, only thirty-eight percent (38%) of polling stations closed at the legal time.

The Mission observed that there were voters in the queues at the closing of polls in some polling stations visited. All voters in the queues at the closing time were allowed to cast their vote.

The election staff reorganised the polling stations and conducted vote count on the spot.

The counting officer counted the ballots on site, and then the election staff completed the relevant documents before handing results sheet to each representative's present, in most of the polling stations observed by the Mission.

The Mission observed that a significant number of the party and candidates' agents in all the polling stations visited.

The Mission noted that the conduct of the election was also well covered by national and international media, both public and private.

X. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) Conclusion

The Mission commends the democratic and political maturity of the Congolese people, who voted in a calm, peaceful, and orderly environment without major incidents.

The Mission commends the Government and all internal and external stakeholders who engaged with it, whose constructive engagements contributed to successful fulfil its mandate.

The Mission urges all stakeholders to pursue their efforts in consolidating democratic gains and strengthen structural reforms with a view to preserving democracy, sustainable peace, and greater inclusiveness in the future elections.

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The Mission welcomes the fact that the presidential election was conducted in a credible, transparent, and fair manner in accordance with international, continental, and regional standards, as well as the national legal framework for election. This is a cause for satisfaction and a prelude for further strengthening of democratic governance in this African Union member state, the Republic of Congo.

(b)Recommendations:

Against this background, the Mission makes the following relevant recommendations:

To the Government:

- Continue efforts to implement consolidating, through consensus-based, and progressive reforms of the electoral process in a more inclusive manner, with the aim of fostering optimal conditions for full democratic electoral participation in future elections.
- Continue the national dialogue to overcome divides in any circumstances.
- Explore the possibility of supporting public funding for candidates, parties, and coalitions running for election to further encourage female and youth candidacies in the elections.
- Ensure better operational coverage of Internet and telephone networks before, during, and after the election to facilitate the work of election missions and guarantee a constant access for the population.

To the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs):

- Maintain and further strengthen ongoing, inclusive dialogue between EMB and the candidates, parties, and coalitions under any circumstances.
- Communicate with all stakeholders at every stage of the electoral process to resolve current or future disputes.
- Develop more detailed electoral statistics, disaggregated by men, women, girls, and youth, while taking into account the type of disability, vulnerable individuals, and their level and type of vulnerability, in order to establish more appropriate voting logistics (Braille ballots, large-print ballots, use of sign language, installation of access ramps, among other measures).

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- Ensure access to electoral information for all stakeholders, including both the ruling party and the opposition, as well as citizens and civil society organisations.
- Further build the capacity of personnel deployed for electoral operations and emphasize the importance of adhering to pre-election, election, and post-election procedures under any circumstances.
- Ensure the proper preservation of ballots after the counting phase to allow for their potential use in the event of a challenge to the results.

To the candidates, political parties, and coalitions in the race:

- Promote greater effective participation by youth and women in electoral processes and in their decision-making bodies, including within political and electoral institutions.
- Ensure that representatives of the candidates are present at all polling stations to enhance the transparency of the electoral process.
- Expand the framework for dialogue and consultation to all aspects of national political life in order to preserve democratic peace in the country.

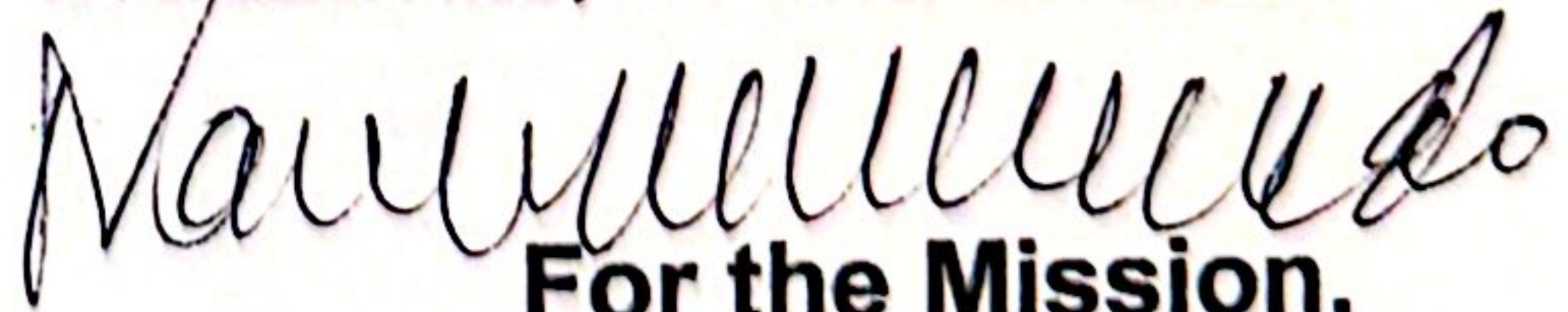
To Civil Society Organisations:

- Continue its efforts to provide civic and voter education and ensure the monitoring of election while maintaining neutrality and apolitical objectivity toward all political spectrum.
- Mobilize additional resources to carry out its missions.

To the African Union and the International Community:

- Continue their diplomatic and strategic cooperation in order to maintain their resolute support for the Republic of Congo and assist it in its resilient efforts to promote and consolidate democracy, the rule of law, and sustainable development.

Brazzaville, 17 March 2026


For the Mission,

H.E. Nana Akufo-Addo Dankwa

Head of Mission

