



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing**  
**Elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

**Tuesday, November 27, 2018**

**2:30 – 3:30 PM**

**2200 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Good afternoon and welcome to this Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission briefing on the upcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We have a distinguished group of panelists joining us today and I would like to thank them for their presence.

The Commission has been concerned about the human rights situation in the DRC for a while now. This is the third time we have convened a panel of experts since it became clear that President Joseph Kabila would refuse to step down when his second five-year term ended in 2016.

We and many others in Congress been tracking the efforts by Congolese activists, the Catholic church, regional leaders, and the international community to facilitate an electoral transfer of power that could open the door to a brighter future for the Congolese people. Both the Obama and the Trump administrations have used high-level diplomatic engagement combined with economic sanctions to try to get to a positive outcome.

So I think it is good news that presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections have all finally been scheduled for December 23. Holding elections is a step forward – if they are credible.

Unfortunately, as we will hear this afternoon, there is evidence of irregularities that raise doubts about the government's capacity and commitment to oversee a fair and transparent electoral contest.

For the sake of the Congolese people, I hope that President Kabila does everything in his power to ensure that the elections are free and fair. That includes making sure that candidates for office can campaign safely and that foreseeable technical and logistical issues are fixed before election day.

President Kabila needs to understand that people around the world are paying attention to these elections.

If things don't go as well as they need to, there will be consequences.

Today the House will consider under suspension H.R. 6207, The Democratic Republic of the Congo Democracy and Accountability Act of 2018.

This is a bill that codifies existing economic sanctions against individuals in the DRC and encourages additional sanctions – until such time as free and fair presidential elections in accordance with the Constitution of the DRC have been held and a democratically elected President has been sworn in and taken office.

So President Kabila has a real opportunity a month from now. I sincerely hope he takes it.

With that, let me turn to Alexis Arieff of the Congressional Research Service who will moderate the briefing.