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**MISSION STATEMENT**

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African peoples as they engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

**A BRIEF HISTORY**

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa.

**Interview with Senator  
Florentin Mokonda Bonza,  
President of the Convention of Christian  
Democrats Party in the Democratic Republic of  
the Congo**



Left to right: Policy Analyst Jacques Bahati, Senator Florentin Mokonda Bonza and former minister of Finance Albert Bombito Botomba at a Briefing at AFJN's office on March 24th, 2017



Left to Right: Policy Analyst Jacques Bahati, D.R.C Minister of Information Lambert Mende Omalanga and Civil Society Activist and Attorney Mr. Mulegwa Zinhindula at a briefing at AFJN's office on March 20, 2017

*The interview was conducted and translated from French to English by AFJN's Policy Analyst, Jacques Bahati and edited by Lauren Rogers, AFJN's Development Associate.*

In late March 2017, Senator Florentin Mokonda Bonza, member of the opposition, and Lambert Mende Omalanga, Minister of Information, took part in the Africa Faith & Justice Network's (AFJN) information and advocacy efforts in Washington, DC, aimed at supporting the full implementation of the agreement brokered by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on December 31, 2016. Other guests who were

invited but did not make the event were the Chairman of the National Independent Electoral Commission, a representative of the Catholic Bishops Conference and a representative of the Protestant Church.

Senator Mokonda and Minister Mende both took part in the political dialogue in the DRC facilitated by the African Union and led by the former Prime Minister of Senegal, Mr. Edem Kodjo, as well as the negotiations led by the Catholic Bishops, headed by the Archbishop of Kisangani, H.E. Bishop Marcel Utembi. The African Union negotiations ended with the signing of the political agreement between some opposition parties and the presidential coalition on October 18, 2016. The negotiations by the Catholic Bishops ended with the signing of another political agreement between the presidential majority and a much larger number of opposition parties on December 31, 2016. The two rounds of talks gave the DRC a new roadmap toward ending the current institutional crisis. The interview below explores what has taken place since these agreements. Please note that Senator Mokonda's views do not represent Africa Faith & Justice Network's views on the political crisis in the DRC.

***1. Can you please tell us a bit about you as well as what is the political platform you belong to and who created it?***

My name is Florentin Mokonda Bonza. I was born in Buta (Bas-Uélé, DRC) on the 4th of April 1948. I am an elected Senator of the Bas-Uélé Province since February 2007 and a professor at the University of Kinshasa. In the past, I was deputy minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development from November 1983 to July 1988 and subsequently held the following ministries: Portfolio, Higher Education, Academic and Scientific Research, National Economy and Industry, and Rural Development. From 28 July 1988 to 31 December 1991 I assumed the duties of the Director of the Cabinet of President Mobutu.

My party, the Convention of Christian Democrats, is co-founder of the platform "New Initiative for the Congo". Other co-founders are:

- The National Union of Christian Democrats, under the leadership of Senator Leon Engulu;
- The Rally of Social and Federalist Forces, under the leadership of Senator Vincent de Paul Lunda-Bululu;
- The Democratic and Social-Christian Party, under the leadership of Senator André Boboliko;
- The Collective of Congolese Federal Democrats, under the leadership of Mr. André-Gabriel Liwa;
- The New Dynamics for the Republic, under the direction of Mr. Jules-César Ibula;
- The Common Front of the Nationalists, under the direction of Mr. Bob Mandungu.

In addition to these seven parties, there are three well-known personalities in the political and intellectual world who have held leadership positions in government or public sector. These are Mr. Albert Bombito Botomba, Mr. Andre Moloto wa Lopanza and Professor Jean Kambayi Bwatshia. At present, the platform has expanded with 3 new political parties. New applications for membership are in the pipeline.

***2. Can you give us a quick summary of what you think are the main issues facing the D.R. Congo currently and what you would do to bring about a solution if you had a chance to hold a position of power other than senator?***

In my humble opinion, DR Congo is confronted with six main obstacles that block its growth and its emergence: a state in dangerous free fall, an unprecedented moral crisis, a very advanced state of poverty in rural and urban areas, a totally disarticulated economy, a deterioration of the quality of education and an outdated health system.

The actions we propose to take to reverse the situation and lead the country towards sustainable double-digit economic growth and long-term emergence include:

- The rebuilding of a nation-state and the rationalization of the democratic process through the establishment of a development administration, a fair and effective judicial system, a national and republican army and police with the mission to restore peace, protect the movement of people and goods and, of course, defend the authority of the State throughout the nation;
- The moralization of Congolese society by undertaking a merciless struggle against corruption, misappropriation of public funds, rapid and illicit enrichment, nepotism and clientelism, politicization of public administration and public enterprises, privatization of the State, purchase of people's consciences, etc. ;
- The reconstruction of the Congolese economy in order to reduce poverty in rural and urban areas by creating new jobs with particular emphasis on transportation infrastructure, agriculture, agro-industry, manufacturing, small and medium-sized enterprises, the rational exploitation of forest resources, etc. ;
- Improving the quality of education from basic to higher education and university, and its professionalization with the view to increase its competitiveness and its real contribution to national development;
- The guarantee of better health coverage through accelerated reconstruction of medical infrastructures and better care administration, and ultimately a longer life expectancy for every Congolese.

***3. In your political career have you done anything which the Congolese people as a whole or the people who elected you should remember you for?***

For nearly five years, my interventions in the Senate have been widely publicized.

- In December 2012, during the capture of the city of GOMA by the militia of the M23, my firm position allowed the national and international community to understand the maneuvers of the power of Kinshasa to undermine the cohesion and the unity within the national army. Indeed, the Congolese authorities deployed officers and troops from a single rebel movement, namely the CNDP, from Uvira in South Kivu to Aru in Ituri.
- In January 2015, my striking intervention helped stop the process of passing the electoral law already voted in the National Assembly and proposed, to save time, the replacement of enrollment by the census.
- More recently, precisely in June 2016, an oral question with debate addressed to the head of the government allowed me to show the Congolese people and the world the inadequacies of government action in the face of the economic and social crisis from which the country is suffering.

In my province, more than one can remember my two important initiatives: the Dingila seed farm and the Buta Higher Teachers College while I was a member of the government of the Republic. My four-year stay in Bas-Uélé, between January 1993 and November 1996, commitment to the formation of human capital I helped create three institutions of higher education. They are the Uélé University with the Dominican Fathers, the Higher Institute of Rural Development of Amadi with the Augustinian Fathers and the Higher Institute of Medical Techniques of Isiro with the support of the Bishop of Isiro-Niangara. I also introduced the cultivation of Soya in the perimeter of Dingila, teaching development to grassroots communities and the establishment of a cooperatives of non-governmental development organizations. Maybe not much! In our African countries where Heads of State privilege the cult of personality, all achievements are automatically attributed to the holder of power. The others are always at the service of the later.

However, many Congolese will remember my active presence alongside the late President Mobutu for the advent of democracy and my resignation at the end of December 1991, a very rare political event in the Democratic Republic of Congo yesterday and today.

***4. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has been facilitating the negotiations between different political stakeholders in the D.R. Congo to mainly get them to agree on how and when to hold elections. On December 31, 2016, all parties involved came out with a political and inclusive agreement to move forward. Why or why not do you think the Congolese people should support this agreement? How can D.R. Congo's foreign partners support the D.R. Congo in this time of crisis?***

I believe that the support of the Congolese people for the December 31 agreement, in spite of the shift in favor of President Joseph Kabila, can be explained by the prospect of peace and democratic power transfer expressed in the announcement of power sharing between the presidential majority and the opposition, including the Rassemblement [another major political party coalition]. This support can be explained by the Congolese people's anxiety over foreseeable violence and the assurance that the presidential and legislative elections can be held in December 2017. Therefore, the people were assured of democratic power transfer.

The DRC's external partners were called upon to support the agreement in order to guarantee its applicability and, above all, to mobilize the necessary resources for the physical organization of the elections. For, at all costs, it was necessary to prevent the government from arrogating to itself the right to finance the elections alone, with the risk of postponing them to an unknown date.

***5. What would you say to those who believe that H.E. President Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not legitimate because his term expired on December 19, 2016? What does the Constitution say about this issue and what did the negotiators of the December 31<sup>st</sup> agreement do about it?***

The announcement of the appointment of a new prime minister outside the framework provided for by the agreement risks provoking a new showdown between the current regime and the Congo-

lese people. I have repeatedly said that the resolution of the crisis could not be done with President Kabila and the Rassemblement platform because Kabila remains the cause of all the current problems.

This agreement needs to be revisited and it would be a third way to give it a more impersonal outline and to save it from manipulation by political actors. The DRC has people who if associated with CENCO [National Catholic Conference of Bishops] can give a more adequate explanation to this agreement, which makes the two main implementing structures of the agreement, namely the CNSA [National Council for the Follow-up of the Agreement] and the Government, prisoners of the Presidential Majority and the Rassemblement.

When it comes to cooperation in times of crisis, the DRC must showcase its best sons and daughters in its cooperation show window. More than ever, we need significant financial resources to address the many social and electoral challenges we face. Cooperation must be based on an internal impulse which is now totally absent. The ball is therefore first in the camp of the DRC which must establish a government made of trustworthy people who can obtain support from the international community and thus face the crisis as trusted people.

***6. The terms of members of all elected officials serving in the national and provincial parliaments, senators and governors, expired, but they continue to conduct business for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Are they also considered illegitimate? What does the constitution say about this issue and what did the negotiators of the December 31<sup>st</sup> agreement do about it?***

The provisions of Articles 103 and 105 of the Constitution are clear in the case of national parliamentarians and senators. Their term expires at the installation of the new Assembly and the new Senate. The same goes for the provincial parliamentarians. It should be noted that senators and governors are elected at the second level by provincial parliamentarians. After a five-year term, there would normally have been election organized by the President of the Republic to elect new parliaments, in accordance with the Constitution, which does not provide for any binding constitutional deadline. Seen in this way, national and provincial parliamentarians and senators are all illegitimate.

But since there is no binding deadline and elections were neither financed by the government nor actually organized by the CENI [National Independent Electoral Commission], it is the government that deserves to be blamed and not the CENI. It should be remembered that in 2012 it was the National Assembly controlled by the presidential majority that stopped the 2011 electoral cycle. The question at hand is how to organize elections of provincial assemblies from which the Senators and the Governors are elected? That is why the December 31 Accord provided that all holders of elected offices remain in place until the elections are held.

***7. The National Independent Electoral Commission under the chairmanship of the late Abbe Malumalu, may he rest in peace, presented two electoral calendars which were rejected. Who rejected which calendar and why?***

The schedules were rejected mainly by the opposition, all trends combined because of their partial nature and mostly because the electoral cycle was going to begin with urban, municipal and local elections. The opposition wanted a timetable that is global on the one hand and that favors the presidential and legislative elections over the others.

**8. *H.E. President Kabila and his coalition majority agreed to share power with the opposition during the transition until a new president is elected and has, according to the December 31<sup>st</sup> agreement, agreed that the job of Prime Minister who is the head of the government be given to the opposition platform called the "Rassemblement". When and who created the Rassemblement and what kind of platform is it within the political landscape of D.R. Congo politics?***

The platform called "The Rally of Political and Social Forces Committed to Change" was created in Brussels, the capital of the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union, in June 2016 by a conglomerate of political parties and groups. The platform was led by the late President Etienne Tshisekedi, charismatic leader of the political party called UDPS and President of the Council of Elders of said platform. The unexpected death of this patriarch caused split within the platform, and we now have three wings fighting for leadership. It is almost unanimous that Mr. Moses Katumbi, the wealthy former governor of Katanga, pulls the strings, instrumentalises members of the platform and plays Santa Claus.

**9. *Constitutionally and mathematically can you please explain how a Prime minister is selected and nominated? Furthermore, can you constitutionally and mathematically explain how the negotiators of the December 31<sup>st</sup> agreement framed the process to give the post of prime minister to the Rassemblement which in fact holds only a small number of representatives in the parliament?***

The Prime Minister is appointed in accordance with article 78, paragraph 1, of the Constitution, which states: "The President of the Republic appoints the Prime Minister from the ranks of the parliamentary majority after consultation of the latter. He terminates the functions of the Prime Minister upon presentation by the latter of the resignation of the Government."

The discussion about the appointment of the Prime Minister took place behind closed doors between the representatives of the President of the Republic and those of the Rassemblement under the mediation of the CENCO. At the time of the drafting the Agreement, it was then adopted the sacrosanct principle of respecting the Constitution. This how Article 78 was cited and taken into account.

The Rassemblement, like the rest of the opposition, must be part of the parliamentary majority to govern. If not, how can the prime minister become nominated by the National Assembly, and how can we avoid motions of distrust or censorship that could destabilize the government?

The 64 parliamentarian members of the Rassemblement, according to the calculations of the presidential majority, should therefore adhere to the parliamentary majority. And the President of the Republic, instead of consulting the entire parliamentary majority, would limit this exercise to the

Rassemblement alone. However, any consultation process involves several people to consult. That is why the presidential majority demanded a list of seven, five and ultimately three people to allow the head of State to make his choice. The Bishops have always been in favor of a list of three. For my part, this position was worth its weight in gold. The short duration of the pre-election period required a frank collaboration between the two heads of the Executive: the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister.

***10. The current prime minister, H.E. Samy Badibanga, is from the opposition party and was nominated as a result of the October 18, 2016, political agreement facilitated by the African Union and led by Mr. Edem Kodjo. Knowing that the President has no legal ground to fire him and only the parliament and the Senate can file a motion of no confidence and remove him, is Prime Minister Badibanga ready to resign so that a new prime minister can be named, confirmed by congress and appointed by the president, or will he use his constitutional rights to try to remain in his post?***

In fact, under normal conditions, the Constitution can be expected to be applied. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the Constitution is often violated with impunity, the Prime Minister is at the mercy of the President of the Republic. When the latter decides to fire him, he runs without flinching. As proof, the national and international community saw this happen in real time on Wednesday, April 5, 2017, during the joint Congressional session when the Head of State announced the appointment of a prime minister within 48 hours. The following day, Samy Badibanga dropped his resignation off and on Friday, April 7, for the first time in the history of the reign of Joseph Kabila, Tshibala was appointed.

***11. Negotiators of the December 31, 2016 agreement decided on an electoral calendar, does it include all constitutionally required elections or will it be partial again and why?***

It is incorrect to assert that the delegates to the direct negotiations of the CENCO have agreed on an electoral calendar, because the publication of this one is exclusive of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). Only one important principle was adopted, namely the organization of the national and provincial elections for the presidential and legislative elections in December 2017. It should be noted that the agreement provided that the Government, the National Council for the Follow-up of the Agreement and the electoral process (CNSA) and the CENI could, at any time after assessment, eventually modify the dates.

In addition, the agreement provided that a consensual government be set up quickly. The appointment of Prime Minister Tshibala on April 7, 2017, makes me think that the desire to have a consensual government is moving away more and more. It is not clear that the team being formed by Tshibala is supported by all those who claim to be members of the Rassemblement.

According to the CENI, the electoral calendar can only be made public when voters enrollment is completed and the law on the distribution of seats - in other words, the redistricting law - is signed by the President of the Republic.

***12. With the delay in implementing the December 31<sup>st</sup> agreement are you confident that the elections will take place at the end of the year? If no, who is to blame? Why isn't the date of the elections set already?***

I strongly doubt that elections will be held in December 2017. Initially, responsibilities were going to be shared between the presidential majority and the Rassemblement. Their disagreements did not allow to the process to move forward. The appointment of an out-of-character prime minister allows the political family of the President of the Republic to continue to manage the country according to its methods of governance decried by the national and international community and to perpetuate the anti-values that are destroying the Congolese society for the benefit of development of neighboring countries. I have repeatedly said during various meetings that the problem of the DRC can be summed up this way: President Joseph Kabila. The solution cannot come from him.

***13. To the best of your knowledge, is H.E. President Joseph Kabila going to run for president? Is there even any constitutional plan to get him to run for a third term?***

Referring to the Constitution, President Joseph Kabila does not have any legal provision paving the way for a third term. In addition, the agreement is clear on this. However, I do not feel that the terms of the December 31, 2016 agreement will be applied. In this case, everything becomes possible with the will repeatedly manifested by the presidential majority, whose main objective is constantly asserting in a loud and intelligible voice that the President is young and that he must continue the work of modernizing the country. Consequently, he can only succeed to himself. Several Machiavellian plans are in the works to enable them to realize their disastrous designs.

***14. Is the National Independent Electoral Commission preparing to hold all required elections by the constitution at once or is it preparing to hold partial elections?***

According to the Agreement of 18 October 2016 and that of 31 December 2016, three elections will be held in a single sequence: the presidential election, the national and provincial legislative elections, with all the risks involved in the coupling of several elections. It remains to be seen whether the government will be able to mobilize all financial means, especially when the President of the Republic, addressing the Nation before the two chambers convened in Congress, insists on the sovereignty of the State in the preparation and the organization the elections. Practically, one can understand that the government will not therefore solicit the financial support of external partners. Also as the European Union announced that it will not recognize the Tshibala government, it can only please the presidential majority that sees victory in delaying the holding of elections. In conclusion, I confirm my doubts about holding elections in December 2017, and even making the presidential elections a priority. It is a real national drowning awaiting the DRC if solutions are not quickly realized.



**15. On March 27th, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which facilitated the political dialogue, made a speech titled “Speech to end the Work on the Special Arrangements for the implementation of the Agreement of the Global Politics and Inclusive Agreement of the Interdiocesan Center in Kinshasa.” Why did they chose March 27? Do you agree with news reports saying that the Catholic Bishops resigned from their mandate as facilitators or was the speech just a report of what they have accomplished so far?**

I sincerely believe that the Bishops, despite their good faith, were disillusioned and felt trapped by the political class. For four months they abandoned their dioceses and those they minister to help find solutions to the crucial problems facing our homeland. Either we have no idea of the gravity of the situation, or, obsessed by selfish interests, we are blind to the fact that time is running out. The pinnacle was when the main protagonists - the presidential majority and the Rassemblement - were kicking the ball at each other and lost sight of what is essential.

The hidden agendas of all parties annoyed, scandalized and even shocked the Bishops who had embarked on this adventure by overestimating the patriotism, goodwill and managerial capacity of certain political actors. In my humble opinion, the speech of March 27 was an external expression frustration. No doubt that the Bishops were determined to lead this boat to good harbor. Perhaps they could once again put themselves at the service of the nation if they were asked to do so. It is up to them to decide.

**16. So far there is no prime minister nominated by opposition platform called « Rassemblement » as stipulated in the December 31<sup>st</sup> agreement. Considering you were one of the negotiators of this agreement, what are the main points of disagreement and what do you suggest needs to happen to move forward?**

On Friday, April 7, 2017, the President of the Republic appointed a Premier from the ranks of the Rassemblement, which is divided into three factions. Without getting into internal business of the Rassemblement, I have, like everyone else, noticed that we have not yet left the inn. If this appointment arranges the President of the Republic and his political family, I am convinced that it will continue to keep the opposition and the Congolese demanding a change. After the Prime Minister, let's see who will take control of the National Council for the Follow Up of the Agreement and the electoral process.

The central question I am asking myself, like many compatriots is this: what justified the choice of the President of the Republic after the experience of Prime Minister Badibanga’s government? Is it really the will to stop the deterioration of the economic and financial situation, to prepare the elections in peace and harmony, to end the killing in Kasai province and the insecurity prevailing in the East, to subdue the misery of the Congolese, or is it something else? There is here something to be skeptical about!

The four months of work at the Inter-diocesan Center (December 2016-March 2017) [under the mediation of the CENCO] made it clear to me that it was impossible to find a consensual and peaceful solution for the country with the egos of two main protagonists: the presidential majority and the Rassemblement. I therefore felt, in all modesty, that the CENCO had to think of an intermediate solution. I more than once urged the CENCO leadership to invite some wise Congolese who are not directly worried about the sharing of ministerial posts to reflect on all the possible alternatives that could lead to a third way.

I sincerely thought that, in the course of these political discussions, with the exception of the delegates to the negotiations, it might be possible, from the profile defined in Special Arrangement, to identify two or three neutral people among whom the President could designate a prime minister to lead the government and lead the people to the elections. It is my belief that the President of the Republic opted for a government of defiance with the risk of further deteriorating the situation. Thumbs up for the “glissement,” [the political tactic to keep the president in power]! The appointment of the new prime minister is outside the framework of the agreement and is likely to provoke a new showdown between the current regime and the political class with all the unpredictable outcome.

***17. The D.R. Congo is a very rich country, but why is it that the government still says that there is not enough money to finance the elections as it is required by the Constitution? Don't you think that asking for money from foreign governments exposes the country to further interferences?***

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is money. If not, how can we explain the contraction of villas, hotels and buildings of all kinds? How can one dispose of accounts opened in tax havens or garnish car fleets if it is not with funds from the public treasury? Where does the wealth of politicians - politicians who are wealthy after five years or less of managing a department, a province or another institution - come from? The management of the state budget is more than irrational: fictitious staff in the public administration, the army and the national police, financing luxurious expenses not included in the budget, overbilling of expenditures projects approved in ordinary budgets and overspending the budgets of the political institutions.

All these mechanisms of predation make the country and the people poor in spite of all the natural resources it contains. It goes without saying that if the country continues to rely on partners to finance elections, it is these partners who designate those who govern. We have experienced this in the past.

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