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BELGIUM AND THE CONGO

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The purpose of my statement is mainly to answer two questions which are repeatedly raised against the Belgian policy in the Congo.

- 1) Why did Belgium grant independence to the Congo so quickly?
- 2) Why did Belgium not prepare the Congolese for self-government?

First of all, I would like to state a few facts as background information. The Congo has an area of 900,000 square miles - 1/3 of the area of the United States, and 82 times the size of Belgium.

The population of the Congo is roughly 13,000,000 people, whereas the foreign population was about 115,000 people on the eve of independence -- among which were 90,000 Belgians including women and children. The Belgian active population amounted to approximately 36,000. I want to underline the fact that the Congo, being a Central African country, as far as its evolution is concerned, cannot be compared with that of Nigeria, Ghana, and other Western African countries which have been in contact with the outside world for several centuries. In 1908 the Congo became a Belgian colony, but as my country was involved in two World Wars, the Belgian authorities were not in a position to do much in the Congo during those periods, which means that the Belgian activities in the Congo were limited to 42 years only.

What have we done during that short period of time? First of all, we have provided the Congo with an excellent economic infrastructure, and the Congo has, at present, at its disposal 10,000 miles of navigable waterways, 3,000 miles of railroads, 86,000 miles of highways, and 20,000 miles of inland airways. Belgian investments in the Congo reach the high amount of 3 billion dollars, and if you take into consideration the fact that the population of the United States is twenty times that of the Belgian population, that figure of 3 billion dollars is equivalent to an amount of 60 billion dollars according to American standards. From 1950 to 1959, the total amount of wages paid to Congolese workmen increased by 185%, although during the same period the total amount of workers increased by only 15%.

As far as our achievements in the medical field are concerned, I quote a statement published in the November 1960 issue of the World Health Organization Bulletin: "The Congo possesses an excellent network of hospitals, dispensaries, and modern laboratories as well as a good auxiliary medical staff. And I would like to mention the rarely known fact that half of the Congolese babies are born in hospitals."

Much has been said about the education the Belgians allegedly failed to provide for the Congolese. But most of these statements are inaccurate, and I take pride in mentioning the fact that on the eve of independence 1,700,000 children attended school, which represents 14% of the total Congolese population. Only one African country, Ghana, comes close to this percentage. We have created two universities in the Congo with the same standards as the Belgian universities. Time and again, it has been stated that on the 30th of June last year, only a small group - 31, in fact - had obtained a university degree. These statements are misleading,

because we also had at that time 136 medical assistants, who are considered as doctors in other parts of Africa, 6,000 nurses, midwives and other medical and technical personnel, and 500 priests who have received a high education. May I recall the statement made by Mr. Adlai Stevenson in New York on August 6th, 1957:

"In the ex-colonial African countries like the great Belgian Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, French Africa, the white man is working overtime to meet the great challenge of emerging Africa, this is especially apparent in education, health, agriculture, industrial development and political participation."

On June 30th, 1960, Patrice Lumumba himself, then Prime Minister of the Congo, made a speech in which he said, "Whatever has been done here, we owe to the Belgians. Belgium has been able to recognize our independence without delay and without restriction; this is due to the realistic policy of its leaders, which pays honor to Belgium. We trust that this policy will lead to a lasting and fruitful relationship between our two peoples, henceforth equal and linked by friendship."

Of course, we knew in Brussels that the Congolese were not yet ready for independence, but we have been subjected to heavy internal and external pressure. I need only to remind you of the Bandung Conference in 1956, of the Accra Conference of December 1958. Furthermore, in 1960 alone, 17 new African states reached the status of independence. As far as the internal pressure is concerned, riots broke out in Leopoldville in January 1959 and 47 people were killed. On October 30th 1959, riots broke out in Stanleyville, the stronghold of Patrice Lumumba: 70 people were killed and hundreds wounded. On the other hand, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved, last December, by 89 votes, a declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. It stated that (quote) "the lack of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence..."(unquote).

The only way to prevent the Congolese from becoming independent was to wage a colonial war: as we Belgians have been fighting so long for our own independence, we were not ready to wage such a war, and of course, it was out of the question to get the support of anyone including the United States. So we took two important steps: First of all, on a proposal made by the Belgian Government, the Belgian Parliament agreed to earmark without strings \$100,000,000 during the year 1960 alone for the Congo and the Trusteeship Territories of Ruanda-Urundi.

Taking into account the differences in the volume of the population between the United States and Belgium, this represents an effort as high as 2 billion dollars for one year according to American standards. On the other hand, my Government concluded with the Congolese Government on the eve of independence a General Treaty of Friendship, Assistance and Cooperation in which it was decided: that the Belgian Government would place at the disposal of, and under the authority of the Congolese Government - upon mutually agreed terms - a staff in the administrative, judicial, military, cultural, scientific and educational fields. The "Loi Fondamentale" -- the provisional constitution of the Congo -- clearly stipulates, in Article 250, that "Belgian civil servants and employees, Belgian officers and non-commissioned officers, career magistrates on duty in the Congo on the 30th of June 1960, are placed at the disposal of the Government." Ten thousand Belgian civil servants were ready to help the Congolese wholeheartedly in the first stage of their independence.

If we had foreseen that independence would come so suddenly, we might have been able to hasten the training of the Congolese and maybe, it would have been better for them to lower the standards of education which had been fixed. Remember also that even at the Bandung Conference in 1956, Chou-En-Lai, the Chinese leader, declared that a period of 15 years would be required before the colonies would reach independence.

You are fully aware of what happened a few days after the independence of the Congo: the mutiny of the Force Publique, the raping of hundreds of Belgian women, the exodus of a large number of my countrymen, the appeal for help made by Lumumba to Moscow and Peking, the chaotic conditions which are now prevailing in some parts of the Congo, the dissention which has existed between some of their leaders and the intervention of the United Nations.

My Government is ready to recall the Belgians mentioned in the U.N. Security Council resolution of the 21st of February 1961. But in order to carry on, the Congolese need the help of foreign technicians and so far, the United Nations has only been able to recruit 196 foreigners for civilian operations in the Congo, while the need for technicians in the private as well as in the public field is much greater.

As Mr. Loridan, Belgian Ambassador to the United Nations, stated on the 6th of this month in the meeting of the General Assembly:

- 1) The independence of the Congo was proclaimed by Belgium without any reservation, limitation or afterthought.  
It is an accomplished fact.
- 2) Belgium wishes to respect the sovereignty of the Congo and refuses to engage in any intervention in the internal affairs of that country.
- 3) Belgium wishes to consolidate friendly relations with the Congo and to develop its cooperation with that country on a basis of esteem and complete equality.
- 4) Belgium condemns any unilateral military aid or assistance furnished to the Congo in any form whatsoever.

As Mr. Stevenson stated in 1957, we have to meet the great challenge of emerging Africa. Your country, Gentlemen, is the leader of the Free World and you will, I feel convinced, meet that great challenge. You may rest assured that you will always find Belgium at your side.