



CONGO: AGONY OF A NATION

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On November 18th, 1999, the official UN representative for children as well as the international community start to take an interest in the "forgotten war" of Congo-Brazaville. There is talk of 800 000 misplaced persons (out of a population of 3 million) who are "forced to live in the most appalling conditions" and there is mention of "a great number of atrocities" committed against civilians. A month later, our team was on the spot. We could see for ourselves how serious the conflict was. Many witnesses we spoke to confirmed reports of thousands of women being raped, of summary executions, of racket and plundering. Fruits of the civil war that continues since December 1998, opposing the regime of Denis Sassou N'Guesso (government troupes and "cobra" militias of the president) and the militia of former president Pascal Lissouba and his prime minister Bernard Kolelas (chased from power in October 1997 during a "coup d'état"). 250 000 people fled the capital and tens of thousands more left other major townships. Trapped by the situation, they have no other alternative than to seek refuge in the forest. For months they survive by eating leaves and roots. It is said that at least 50.000 died in a year. At the root of the conflict are oil and the money at stake. We examine the position of oil company ELF - ambiguous to say the least - and the tolerant attitude of the French government...

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