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Responses to Information Requests

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4 July 2018

COD106122.FE

Democratic Republic of the Congo: The biometric passport, including its appearance and security features; requirements and procedure for obtaining a biometric passport from inside and outside the country (2016-July 2018)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Biometric Passports

For information on the introduction of biometric passports issued since November 2015, see Response to Information Request COD105556 of July 2016.

According to sources, old semibiometric passports [issued before 10 November 2015 (US n.d.)] were expected to become invalid on 14 January 2018 (Radio Okapi 6 Oct. 2017; *La Libre Afrique* 2 Oct. 2017) or on 16 January 2018 (US

n.d.). Information confirming the cancellation of semi-biometric passports in January 2018 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints for this Response.

1.1 Appearance and Security Features of the Passport

According to the US Department of State Reciprocity Schedule for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), there are three types of biometric passports in the DRC:

- Regular: the cover is navy blue and contains the phrase “PASSEPORT” at the bottom of the page;
- Service: the cover is forest green and contains the phrase “PASSEPORTE [sic] DE SERVICE” at the bottom of the page;
- Diplomatic: the cover is burgundy red and contains the phrase “PASSEPORT DIPLOMATIQUE” at the bottom of the page (US n.d.).

The same source notes that the front cover of all DRC passports has the following features, starting from the top:

- The words “REPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO” printed in gold letters along the top of the front cover;
- The national emblems, in gold;
- A ribbon with the words “JUSTICE, PAIX, TRAVAIL” in gold (US n.d.).

According to the Public Register of Authentic Travel and Identity Documents Online (PRADO) of the European Union (EU), the regular passport measures 125 mm by 88 mm, contains 32 pages and has a maximum validity of 5 years (EU n.d.). A detailed description of the regular passport issued in 2016, including its security features, from Keesing Reference Systems, is attached to this Response (Attachment 1).

A detailed description of the diplomatic passport issued in 2016, including its security features, from Keesing Reference Systems, is attached to this Response (Attachment 2).

A detailed description of the service passport issued in 2016, including its security features, from Keesing Reference Systems, is attached to this Response (Attachment 3).

2. Obtaining a Passport

2.1 Obtaining a Passport from Inside the Country

According to the Reciprocity Schedule, the procedure for obtaining a passport is as follows:

- File the application with the ANR office (National Intelligence Agency). Case file should contain a Police Certificate, 2 passportsize pictures, proof of identity (National ID or old passport) and proof of nationality (Birth Certificate or Nationality Certificate);
- Pay the fees at the indicated bank;
- Get photo and fingerprints captured at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (US n.d.)

In a note to its clients published in January 2016, the Trust Merchant Bank (TMB), a commercial bank in the DRC, announced a [translation] “new passport application service at TMB” and states that

passport application forms are now available from TMB. This service is open to everyone, TMB client or nonclient alike.

Passport application forms may now be acquired at the following TMB branches:

- TMB Kinshasa: Place du Marché, Victoire, Limete 7ème rue, UPN, Memling, Grand Hôtel and Boulevard
- TMB Lubumbashi: Lumumba branch
- TMB Bunia
- TMB Bukavu
- TMB Kananga
- TMB Kisangani
- TMB Kindu
- TMB Mbuji-Mayi

Forms cost USD 185.00. Once that amount is deposited, you provide our agent with a copy of the deposit slip (Bordereau de Versement Espèces, BVE) and your identity card, you sign the purchase document in the form and thus obtain the blank form.

Then, without the bank’s intervention, you carefully complete your form; you go to the ANR for fingerprints, then to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or the provincial branch office) to have your photograph taken. The Ministry should issue your passport 48 hours after the photograph is taken. (TMB 29 Jan. 2016)

Other sources also indicate that the fee for obtaining a new passport is US\$185 (US n.d.; ACP 17 Nov. 2017). The Agence Congolaise de Presse (ACP) reports that the cost for replacing an old passport is US\$100 (ACP 17 Nov. 2017).

According to the Reciprocity Schedule, the wait time is approximately one week to receive the passport (US n.d.). The ACP states that, for applicants in Kinshasa, the wait time for receiving their passport [translation] “cannot exceed four clear days” whereas for applicants “outside the capital,” the wait time is 14 “clear days” (ACP 17 Nov. 2017).

However, Radio Okapi, the UN radio station in the DRC (Radio Okapi 22 Sept. 2014), notes that passport applicants [translation] “are forced to bribe government officials” in order to obtain their document more quickly (Radio Okapi 11 Dec. 2017). The same source adds that a network within the administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [translation] “delays or accelerates the issuance of passports depending on the amount of the bribe an applicant is willing or unwilling to pay” (Radio Okapi 11 Dec. 2017). Similarly, the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017* indicates that officials accept bribes to expedite passport issuance (US 20 Apr. 2018, 29). The same source also states that there were “credible reports that the government refused to issue new passports to civil society activists and opposition members critical of the government” (US 20 Apr. 2018, 29-30). Similarly, Actualite.cd, a Congolese news site [translation] “specializing in political, security and economic news,” states that, according to a news release by the NGO La voix des sans voix pour les droits de l'homme (VSV), a number of activists and opponents are reportedly on a blacklist preventing them from obtaining a biometric passport (Actualite.cd 11 Nov. 2017). The same source reports that, according to the news release, the President of the Association Congolaise pour l'Accès à la Justice (ACAJ) did not receive his biometric passport [translation] “under the pretext that his name was on a list of Congolese figures who are not allowed to obtain a biometric passport” (Actualite.cd 11 Nov. 2017).

2.2 Obtaining a Passport from Outside the Country

According to the US Reciprocity Schedule, DRC citizens living overseas may apply for a passport at the nearest DRC embassy (US n.d.). The same source states that the wait time can be longer than one week and the cost can be higher due to mailing charges that may apply (US n.d.). The ACP notes that the wait time to receive a passport must not exceed 28 [translation] “clear days” when the applicant resides outside the country (ACP 17 Nov. 2017).

According to a document on the website of the Embassy of the DRC in Ottawa, those applying for a [translation] “new” [biometric] passport must present the following documents at the “documentation appointment”:

- Proof of Congolese nationality (previous expired Congolese passport, previous Zairian passport or a certificate of nationality issued by the DRC Ministry of Justice and Human Rights);
- A document of legal residence in Canada (permanent resident card, work permit, study permit or “any other document issued by Immigration [C]anada”);
- Four passport photographs less than 6 months old;
- Completed application form;
- Cash payment to cover passport fees (DRC n.d.).

According to another document on the website of the same source, the cost of the biometric passport is C\$400 (DRC 7 Mar. 2016).

Sources report that, on 20 February 2018, Moïse Katumbi, a member of the Congolese opposition, had his passport application rejected at the Embassy of the DRC in Brussels (*Kinshasa Times* 21 Feb. 2018; *Jeune Afrique* 26 Feb. 2018).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Actualite.cd. 11 November 2017. “Plusieurs activistes et opposants seraient sur une liste noire qui les empêche d'acquérir le passeport biométrique (VSV).” [Accessed 11 June 2018]

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Democratic Republic of the Congo – Embassy in Ottawa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Internet sites, including: BBC; Democratic Republic of the Congo – Embassy in London, Embassy in Paris, Embassy to Benelux and the European Union, Primature; ecoi.net; Factiva; *Le Phare*; *Le Potentiel*; Radio France internationale; UN – Refworld.

Attachments

1. Keesing Reference Systems. N.d. "Congo, Democratic Republic - COD - National Passport." [Accessed 18 June 2018]
2. Keesing Reference Systems. N.d. "Congo, Democratic Republic - COD - Diplomatic Passport." [Accessed 18 June 2018]
3. Keesing Reference Systems. N.d. "Congo, Democratic Republic - COD - Service Passport." [Accessed 18 June 2018]

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