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## *House of Representatives*

### Floor Statement on H.R. 780 (DRC)

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey... Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend and colleague, the distinguished chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr. ROYCE; Ranking Member ELIOT ENGEL; and Ms. BASS, who is the ranking member on the Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee, for their strong support for this legislation, H. Res. 780, which seeks to avoid a looming crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC, by urging respect for the constitution of that country in a peaceful, democratic transition of power.

Mr. Speaker, on November 19—just days from now—the DRC was supposed to hold elections for President and the Parliament. However, after stalling on election preparations for more than a year, the government of President Kabila has used a constitutional loophole to extend his rule despite the opposition of not only political opponents but also his country's citizens.

In a recent poll done in partnership with the Congo Research Group at New York University, President Kabila had less than 8 percent support among his people. U.S. officials believe that he has lost even more support in the months since that poll was taken.

Mr. Speaker, from 1996 to 2006, more than 3 million people died in the DRC, more than 4

million were internally displaced as a result of internal and regional wars, and significant violence persists in eastern Congo today—a place that I have visited. There are now widespread fears that opposition to the extension of Kabila's rule will spark demonstrations that will be met by violence by a government determined to maintain its hold on power. We are facing the real danger that the DRC—a nation that borders on nine of its neighbors and which makes vital contributions to the global economy— could be thrown into a level of chaos that will have an adverse impact not just within its borders but far beyond its borders as well.

President Kabila continues to make every effort to maintain power, even sending delegations abroad to mislead foreign governments on his intention to hold elections at the earliest possible date. His emissaries assured us in September that the scheduled 2016 elections could be held in the summer of 2017 as a result of national dialogue.

However, Kabila manipulated this dialogue, which was boycotted by the genuine political opposition, civil society, and DRC's churches. The eventual conclusion, if this can be believed, was that the elections would be held in late 2018, about 2 years from now. However, the constitution, which prevents Kabila from running for a third term or changing the constitution to achieve that goal, will be broken

if he manages to extend his rule. Even as he interprets the constitution to allow him to continue in office, the constitution makes no provision for parliament to continue to operate. So when the current DRC Government mandate expires on December 19, President Kabila will rule his country with no restraint and no checks or balances from a legislative body.

H. Res. 780 acknowledges the various efforts to frustrate DRC's constitution and democratic process and calls for the Obama administration to levy targeted sanctions on government officials who have acted to prevent free and fair elections from taking place.

The administration has placed some sanctions on some officials, but the pace and scope of

sanctions need to match the urgency of the approaching electoral crisis.

The leadership of the Foreign Relations Committee, the Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee, and the full Foreign Affairs Committee have sent a letter to President Obama urging him to widen the targets, and we recommended that a couple of weeks ago.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, time is running out for our government to make the strongest possible statements to the Kabila government to achieve a peaceful, democratic resolution to the crisis that they face. I urge my colleagues to support the resolution.

