

Congo breaks ground on \$58m China-funded parliament building

Congo broke ground on a new Chinese-funded parliament building in the capital Brazzaville on Monday, 22 May, estimated at over \$58m.



Image source: www.brazzaville.cg

The investment from China's government was criticised by opposition groups which pointed out that Congo is in the midst of an economic downturn.

"This project helps to open the capital city to modernity" and "remains one of the biggest collaborative projects done by China in sub-Saharan Africa", said planning minister Jean-Jacques Bouya.

Congo's longtime leader Denis Sassou Nguesso attended the inauguration ceremony in the presence of Qian Keming, China's vice minister of commerce.

Chinese firm Jiangsu Provincial Construction Group Co Ltd will be in charge of construction, which is expected to take about three years.

Lawmaker Serge Michel Odzocki said the project was "a high priority among priorities", a claim hotly disputed by the opposition.

"A new parliament building is not a priority," said Tresor Nzila, executive director of the Congolese Observatory of Human Rights, adding that the crisis in the southern region of Pool and the Congo's overall human rights record should be the country's main priorities.

Fighting broke out last April in the Pool region between government troops and insurgents following Sassou Nguesso's re-election, which was contested by opposition parties.

"I hope this Chinese investment will not impact Congo's future debt, which has already ballooned," said opposition leader Clement Mierassa, president of the Social Democrats party (PSDC).

Congo has substantial deposits of oil, timber and diamonds, but oil production remains its most important economic sector, and Congo is the fourth biggest producer in sub-Saharan Africa.

But dwindling reserves and civil wars that have ravaged the economy has slowed growth, which averaged out at 5% over five years at the end of 2016, according to an IMF report.

Almost half the population of 4.5-million people still lives in poverty and, according to World Bank data, per capita income stood at \$2,540 in 2015. Economic reform programmes have been set up with help from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

This isn't the first Chinese-funded project in the Congo. In May 2011, Congo unveiled a China-funded dam with a capacity of 120MW in Imboulou, about 260km north of capital Brazzaville.

That projet cost 170-billion CFA francs, about €260m at the time.

Source: AFP

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