Early life and career

Lumumba was born to a farmer, François Tolenga Okit'Asombo, and his wife, Julienne Wannato Lombendra, in Onakula in the Katomboko region of the Kasai province of the Belgian Congo.[10] He was a member of the Tetela ethnic group and was born with the name Elias Okt'Asombo. His original surname means "heir of the cursed" and is derived from the Tetela words okit-kiti (their, successor)[11] and asombo (cursed or bewitched people who will die quickly).[12] He had three brothers (Charles Lokolonta, Émile Kalema, and Louis Onuma Pene Lumumba) and one half-brother (Tolenga Jean).[13] Raised in a Catholic family, he was educated at a Protestant primary school, a Catholic secondary school, and finally at the Catholic post office training school, passing the one-year course with distinction. He subsequently worked in Lópoloville (now Kinshasa) and Stanleyville (now Kisangani) as a postal clerk and as a travelling beer salesman. In 1951, he married Pauline Ongogo. In 1955, Lumumba became regional head of the Circles of Stanleyville and joined the Liberal Party of Belgium, where he worked on editing and distributing party literature. After travelling on a three-week study tour in Belgium, he was arrested in 1955 on charges of embezzlement. His two-year sentence was commuted to twelve months after it was confirmed by Belgian lawyer Jules Chorne that Lumumba had returned the funds, and he was released in July 1956. After his release, he helped found the broad-based Movement national congolais (MNC) in 1958, later becoming the MNC's president. Lumumba and his team represented the MNC at the All-African Peoples' Conference in Accra, Ghana, in December 1956. At this international conference, hosted by Pan-African President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Lumumba further solidified his Pan-Africanist beliefs. Lumumba spoke Tetela, French, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba.[9]

Leader of MNC

In late October 1959, MNC leader Lumumba was arrested for inciting an anti-colonial riot in Stanleyville where thirty people were killed; he was sentenced to 69 months in prison. The trial's start date of 18 November 1959 was also the first day of a round-table conference in Brussels to finalise the future of the Congo. Despite Lumumba's imprisonment at the time, the MNC won a convincing majority in the December local elections in the Congo. As a result of strong pressure from delegates upset with Lumumba's trial, he was released and allowed to attend the Brussels conference. The conference culminated on 27 January with a declaration of Congolese independence, setting 30 June 1960, as the independence date with Belgian Congo general election, from 11–25 May 1960. Lumumba and the MNC won this election and the right to form a government, with the announcement on 23 June 1960 of 34-year-old Lumumba as Congo's first prime minister and Joseph Kasavubu as its president. In accordance with the constitution, on 24 June the new government passed a vote of confidence and was ratified by the Congolese Chamber and Senate.

Independence Day was celebrated on 30 June in a ceremony attended by many dignitaries including Belgian King Baudouin and the foreign press.[12] Baudouin's speech praised developments under colonialism, his reference to the "genius" of his great-granduncle Léopold II of Belgium glossing over atrocities committed during the Congo Free State.

For this independence of the Congo, even as it is celebrated today with Belgium, a friendly country with whom we deal as equal to equal, no Congolese worthy of the name will ever be able to forget that it was by fighting that it has been won, a day-to-day fight, an ardent and idealistic fight, a fight in which we were spared neither privation nor suffering, and for which we gave our strength and our blood. We are proud of this struggle, of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depths of our being, for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force.[12]

In contrast to the relatively harmless speech of President Kasavubu, Lumumba’s reference to the suffering of the Congolese under Belgian colonialism stirred the crowd while simultaneously humiliating and alienating the King and his entourage. Some media claimed at the time that he ended his speech by ad libbing, Nos autres sommes pas macaques (We are no longer your monkeys) — referring to a common slur used against Africans by Belgians, however, these words are neither in his written text nor in radio tapes of his speech.[8][14] Lumumba was later harshly criticised for what many in the Western world — but virtually none in Africa — described as the inappropriate nature of his speech.[15]

Actions as Prime Minister

A few days after Congo gained its independence, Lumumba made the fateful decision to raise the pay of all government employees except for the army. Many units of the army also had strong objections toward the uniformly Belgian officers; General Janssens, the army head, told them that their lot would not change after independence, and they rebelled in protest. The rebellions quickly spread throughout the country, leading to a general breakdown in law and order. Although the trouble was highly localised, the country seemed to be overrun by gangs of soldiers and looters, causing a media sensation, particularly over Europeans fearing the country.[16]

The province of Katanga declared independence under regional premier Moïse Tshombe on 11 July 1960 with support from the Belgian government and mining companies such as Union Minière.[17] Despite the arrival of UN troops, unrest continued. Since the United Nations refused to help suppress the rebellion in Katanga, Lumumba sought Soviet aid in the form of arms, food, medical supplies, trucks, and planes to help move troops to Katanga. Lumumba’s decisive actions alarmed his colleagues and President Joseph Kasavubu, who preferred a more moderate political approach.[18]

Deposition, Kidnapping and Murder

In September, the President Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba from government. On 14 September, a coup d'état organised by Colonel Mobutu Sese Seko incapacitated both Lumumba and Kasavubu.
Lumumba was captured by troops loyal to Mobutu in Port Franqui on 1 December 1960. He was flown to Kinshasa (Leopoldville) and murdered by firing squad by the Mobutu Sese Seko regime. Today, it is impossible to touch down at the (far from modernised) Lumumbahshi International Airport in the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo without a shiver of recollection of the haunting photograph taken of Lumumba there shortly before his assassination, and after beatings, torture and a long, long flight in custody across the vast country which he so loved him. — Victoria Britain, The Guardian, 2011

## Legacy

### Political

Patrice Lumumba was Prime Minister of The Congo for 81 days, from June 23rd to September 14th, 1960. To his supporters, Lumumba was an altruistic man of strong character. He favoured a united Congo and opposed division of the country among ethnic or regional lines. Like many other African leaders, he supported pan-Africanism and liberation for colonial territories. He proclaimed his regime one of "positive neutralism," defined as a return to African values and rejection of any imported ideology, including that of the Soviet Union: "We are not Communists or Catholics. We are African nationalists."[24]

### 2006 Congolese elections

The image of Patrice Lumumba continues to serve as an inspiration in contemporary Congolese politics. In the 2006 Democratic Republic of the Congo general election, several parties claimed to be motivated by his ideas, including the People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD), the political party initiated by the incumbent President Joseph Kabila.[25] Antione Gизenga, who served as Lumumba's Deputy Prime Minister in the post-independence period, was a 2006 Presidential candidate under the Unified Lumumbist Party (Parti Lumumbiste Unifié (PALU)) and was named prime minister at the end of the year. Other political parties that directly utilise his name include the Mouvement National Congolais-Lumumba (MNC-L) and the Mouvement lumumbiste (MLP).

### Family and politics

Patrice Lumumba's family is actively involved in contemporary Congolese politics. Patrice Lumumba was married to Pauline Lumumba and had five children; François was the eldest followed by Patrice Junior, Julienne, Roland and Guy-Patrice Lumumba. François was 10 years old when Patrice died. Before his imprisonment, Patrice arranged for his wife and children to move into exile in Egypt, where François spent his childhood, then went to Hungary for education (he holds a doctorate in political economics).

Patrice's youngest son, Guy-Patrice, born six months after his father's death, was an independent presidential candidate in the 2006 elections[27] but received less than 10% of the vote.

### Tributes

* In 1966 Patrice Lumumba's image was rehabilitated by the Mobutu Sese Seko regime and he was proclaimed a national hero and martyr in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By a presidential decree, the Brazzaville house, site of Lumumba's brutal torture on the night of his murder, became a place of pilgrimage in the Congo.[28]
* A major transportation artery in Kinshasa, the Lumumba Boulevard, is named in his honour. The boulevard goes past an interchange with a giant tower, the Tour de l'Echangenthe (the main landmark of Kinshasa) commemorating him. On the tower's plaza, the first Laurent Kabila regime erected a tall statue of Lumumba with a raised hand, greeting people coming from N'Djili Airport.
* In Bambalii, Malo, Lumumba Square is a central place with a life-size statue of Lumumba, with a park with fountains, and a flag display. Around Lumumba Square are various businesses, embassies and Bamako's largest bank.
* Streets were also named after him in Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia, in Budapest, Hungary (between 1961 and 1990); Jakarta (between 1961 to 1967); Gabonorte, Botswana; Belgrade, Serbia; Sofia and Plovdiv, Bulgaria (until 1961-2 Skopje, Republic of Macedonia; Bata, Equatorial Guinea and Malabo, Equatorial Guinea; Tehran, Iran; Algiers, Algeria (Rue Patrice Lumumba).[29] Santiago de Cuba, Cuba (since 1960, formerly Avenida de Bélgica); Lodz, Warsaw, Poland; Kiev, Donetsk, Ukraine; Perm, Russia; Rabat, Morocco; Maputo, Mozambique; Enugu, Nigeria; Leipzig, Germany; Lusaika, Zambia ("Lumumba Street"); Kampala, Uganda and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania ("Lumumba Avenue"); Tunis, Tunisia; Fort-de-France, Martinique; Montpellier, France; Accra, Ghana; Antananarivo, Madagascar; Rotterdam, Netherlands; Alexandria, Egypt and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Koper, Slovenia; Bamako's largest bank.

In Kampala, Uganda, "Lumumba Hall" of Residence at Makerere University continues to carry his name.

"Lumumba" is a popular choice for children's names throughout Africa.[31]

* In 1964 Malcolm X declared Patrice Lumumba "the greatest black man who ever walked the African continent"[32]

### Quotations

* "Dead, living, free, or in prison on the orders of the colonialists, it is not i who counts. It is the Congo, it is our people for whom independence has been transformed into a cage where we are regarded from the outside... History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that Brussels, Paris, Washington, or the United Nations will teach, but that which they will teach in the countries emancipated from colonialism and its puppets... a history of glory and dignity."[33]

### Related Document

**Title**: Document-Hamarskjold and Kennedy vs. The Power Elite  
**Type**: Article  
**Publication date**: 7 August 2016  
**Author(s)**: James Di Eugenio  
**Description**: President John F. Kennedy's hears of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba's murder from UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson. Perhaps no photo from the Kennedy presidency summarises who Kennedy was, and how he differed from what preceded him and what came after him, than this picture.

### Bibliography

**Writings by Lumumba**


**Writings about Lumumba**

* G. Heinz and H. Donnay (pseudonyms for J. Brassine and J. Gerard-Libois), Lumumba: The Last Fifty Days, 1980; New York: Grove Press; ASIN B0006C7C7Q.
* Barbara Kingsolver's The Poisonwood Bible is a fictional account of an American missionary family in the Congo during the election and assassination of Lumumba. The book is critical of Western governments and their interference in Africa.

**Films**

* El Congo 1961 – As himself in a documentary.
* Seduti alla sira destra (1968) – A fictional film by writer-director Valerio Zurlini starring Woody Strode as a thinly disguised Lumumba. It was released in the US as Black Jesus.
* Lumumba: Death of a Prophehé (1992), Documentary distributed by California Newsreel.
In 1961 the song "Top Forty, News, Weather And Sports" by Mark Dinning, the verse "I had Lumumba doing the rumba..." was removed after his death a few weeks after the release of the record.

American songwriter Neil Diamond lists Patrice Lumumba in his song "Done Too Soon".

Colombian salsa musician Yuri Buenaventura composed a song, "Patrice Lumumba", in his honour.

An Argentinian reggae band was named Lumumba.

The rapper Nas dedicates his song "My Country" to Lumumba at the end of the song.

In Viennese coffee houses, Lumumba is a hot chocolate with rum, Lumumba Coffee a black coffee with rum and whipped cream. Both beverages originate from northern Germany, where they are called "Tote Tante" (dead aunt; see Nordstrand, Germany) respectively.

In the 1961 song "Top Forty, News, Weather And Sports" by Mark Dinning, the verse "I had Lumumba doing the rumba..." was removed after his death a few weeks after the release of the record. Records in stores were recalled, and new ones without the verse were distributed. Some of the original records survive. The verse can be heard in versions of the song available today.

BBC On This Day – 19 February 1961: Lumumba Rally Clashes with UK Police

BBC On This Day – 13 February 1961: EX-Congo PM Declared Dead

BBC On This Day – 14 September 1960: Violence Follows Army Coup in Congo

References


8. "Levi and the death of Patrice Lumumba"


External links

- Speeches and writings by and about Patrice Lumumba at the Marxists Internet Archive.
- Virtual Memorial to Patrice Lumumba at Find-A-grave.
- Patrice Lumumba: 50 Years Later, Remembering the U.S.-Backed Assassination — video report by Democracy Now!
- SpyCasting: 1 December 2007: On Assignment to Congo-Peter chats with Larry Devlin, the CIA's legendary station chief in Congo during the 1960s.
- BBC: Lumumba apology: Congo's mixed feelings.
- Mysteries of History: Lumumba assassination.
- Lumumba and the Congo: Documentary of Lumumba's life and work in the Congo.
- BBC: An "On this day" text. It features an audio clip of a BBC correspondent on Lumumba's death.
- Belgian Parliament: The findings of the Belgian Commission of 2001 investigating Belgian involvement in the death of Lumumba. Documents at the bottom of the page are in English.
- Beat Knowledge tribute to Lumumba: Tribute to Lumumba on 50th anniversary of his assassination (17 January 2011).
- Belgian Commissioner's Conclusion: A particular document from the previous link.
- D'Lynn Waldron's extensive archive of articles, photographs, and documents from her days as a foreign press correspondent in Lumumba's 1960 Congo.
- Patrice Emery Lumumba: Memory of Congolese Leader Lives on 50 Years Later.
Patrice Émery Lumumba (2 July 1925 – 17 January 1961) was a Congolese independence leader and the first democratically elected leader of the Congo. As founder and leader of the mainstream Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) party, Lumumba played an important role in campaigning for independence from Belgium. Within twelve weeks of Congolese independence in 1960, Lumumba's government was deposed in a coup during the Congo Crisis following his attempt to solicit support from the Soviet Union against