

Avenue Strategies Podcast with Mr. Modeste Boukadia
English Translation of Interview in French
March 9, 2018

[0:00-1:00]

Introduction/Question 1:

Welcome to the Avenue Strategies podcast. Today, we are honored to be joined by Mr. Modeste Boukadia, the leader of the Republic of Congo political party, Circle of Democrats and Republicans for the Congo or CDRC. Thank you for being here.

Your personal story is so compelling and has taken great courage on your part. Can you please explain how you felt in 1997 and 2009, when you ran for President for a unified Republic of Congo and the tyrannical leader there denied any chance for free and fair elections?

[1:00-1:57]

Modeste Boukadia:

Indeed, I ran for president in 1997 following some dark times. These were the second free elections. But Mr. Sassou, the tyrant and dictator, believed that the elected president, Pascal Lissouba, would be unable to hold free and democratic elections. So he carried out his coup, and that was the end of democracy. After that, he established an authoritarian regime by amending the constitution that had been approved by the people (92%) to impose a presidential constitution that suited him.

[1:57-2:25]

Question 2:

When you arrived in your native country again in early 2016, you were met by a show of force by the dictator now in power and imprisoned, sentenced to 30 years hard labor. How did you endure in that environment for 575 days, during which you were often hospitalized after brutal mistreatment?

[2:25-8:26]

Modeste Boukadia:

Look, it was very hard. I was convicted for one simple reason: I had asked that a national unity government be set up so the whole population could enjoy cohesion and peace, that is, peace between the North and the South--because there is antagonism there. After I asked for this national unity government--because in this dictatorial regime, 98% of civil and military leadership is in the pocket of Mr. Sassou's family--after my conviction, I went to Congo for trial, because I had been convicted in absentia. I arrived on January 10, 2016 with my wife in Brazzaville. When I got out of the Air France plane, 2,000 soldiers were waiting for me. They arrested me and sent me to the Pointe Noire *maison d'arrêt* (prison for those awaiting trial), where 1,000 soldiers also awaited. During this arbitrary incarceration, I was the victim of violence and torture that caused health problems; specifically, issues with my heart and lower back (I'm still wearing the belt). Being deprived of my freedom as a citizen while in prison showed me that nothing is more important than freedom. It also made me look at the world in a

new way. Until then, democracy had been an abstract concept. Freedom had been an abstract concept. But while in prison, I truly understood what democracy is, what good governance is, what freedom is. I was hospitalized many times, and when this happened, the prison director would come to bring me back by force. The treatments I was receiving, for example the drips, he tore those out. And meanwhile, there was an assassination attempt. But I was determined not to be defeated, because I was also fighting for my country. That's why I am so dedicated to those who are still in prison; there are still political prisoners of all stripes, not just from the CDRC. The United Nations Human Rights Commission issued a notice asking the dictatorial regime of Congo to free them. Currently, they are still in prison, and they are ill. But the other political prisoners who ran for president in 2016 are also still in prison and are also suffering. This fight has brought me here to the United States to ask this country to help us free those political prisoners, and, especially, to help Congo get back on the path to good governance. Mr. Sassou, the dictator, is still in power because he has corrupted everyone, because people are poor. However, if there are jobs and investment, people will become much stronger. That's why during many of my meetings in the Congress, Senate, and various American agencies, I explained how tough things are for the people of Congo and how firmly committed I am to moving towards good governance with the help of the United States, and to getting American companies once again investing in Congo. Currently there are no American companies operating in Congo. We need to get there. As I made very clear to the Senators and Congressmen, the easiest way to avoid a war is for the United States to once again take a leadership role in Africa by offering, by demanding, an international conference and a congressional hearing on Congo to discover the reasons for this dictatorship and to help us escape it by holding early elections that will put Congo on the path to good governance, peace, stability, and cohesion. That's what prison taught me. I feel no hate. I'm not looking for a witch hunt. What I want is for the Congolese people to be like the American people, who are a great, strong, dignified, proud people. That's what I want for Congo.

[8:26-8:40]

Question 3:

Can you describe the efforts by your wife, Nadine, and President Trump of the United States and President Macron of France, to gain your release from prison last year?

[8:40-12:01]

Modeste Boukadia:

Yes, of course. You know, I will never be able to thank my wife Nadine Nagel-Boukadia enough for how she has raised awareness among international human rights organizations. She has also called upon democratic countries--France, the European Union, Germany, Great Britain, the United States. She has raised awareness with Amnesty International, the Human Rights League, the FIDH (or the International Federation for Human Rights), and the Congo Human Rights League. Without her, obviously, I believe I would still be in prison. But because of the love she has for me and I for her, she has been able to touch people's hearts in the United States, France, and other European countries. That's why during President Trump himself said, during his presidential campaign I believe, "Mr. Boukadia is a good guy, and we should help him." That's a quote. That's what I've been told. When I heard that President Trump had said

that, my hope for a new dawn was renewed, and I was happy. And when I heard that there was a new president-elect in France, a young man, I thought to myself that indeed, Mr. Trump and Mr. Macron should come together to free every country in the world from the yoke of dictatorship, including all the countries in the world and Africa that are being crushed by the so-called apparatchiks of the Soviet Union. Because Mr. Sassou is part of that Soviet system, and he operates as though he was still in that Soviet world. It's not an open world, that. He's a criminal. He acts just like the Syrian president. He is bombing a portion of the population, in the South, in Pool, with heavy weaponry. And recently, he wanted to use sarin gas. It was the presidents of the DRC, Angola and Gabon who opposed this. That means that we're actually talking about a criminal here, and I'm sorry to say that certain European powers are still friends with him. That's why I will never stop praising my wife, Nadine, and sincerely and heartily thanking Presidents Trump and Macron.

[12:01-12:05]

Question 4:

Why are you in the United States this week?

[12:05-15:23]

Modeste Boukadia:

I am in the United States this week because I've already been to some countries in Europe, and I've written to French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe, and to President Emmanuel Macron to let them know about the ongoing war and crisis in southern Congo, despite the agreements that [Sassou Nguesso] signed last March 5. He has still sent soldiers and combat helicopters to bomb civilians. So, I thought I must go to the greatest power in the world, where democracy and good governance are not just words. They really mean something. I felt I needed to warn the Trump administration and the United States, which fights for and helps poor countries, that they need to listen to us and exert financial and economic pressure through the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Fed to impose an embargo on holdings--that is, a seizure of holdings--of Mr. Sassou and his family. In this way, Mr. Sassou will be forced to ease up on the population, and at the same time, the way can be paved for an early presidential election following what I call the "International Conference", which is the best diplomatic solution (as the European Union said, an international conference on Congo would be the best way to bring democracy back to Congo). That is why I have come to the United States, where I have met with many senators and congressmen. They have listened to me and approved of this solution in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis. That is why I am so insistent, and why I am asking again; I know the United States is sensitive to this issue. We must get the International Conference and a congressional hearing on Congo off the ground so we can see why Congo, with a population of barely five million and great wealth, is so indebted, and why the Congolese people are living on less than a dollar a day even though Congo is rich. That is why I've come this week to meet representatives of the U.S. government, and they have listened very well to what I have to say.

[15:23-15:38]

Question 5:

How have you been received in your meetings on Capitol Hill and with others interested in your vision for Congo-Brazzaville?

[15:38-21:05]

Modeste Boukadia:

I am very pleased, because they have listened. They understand. When I arrived, nearly all the agencies and senators already knew that I had been in prison, but they didn't know why I was in prison, because I had never committed any crimes. I had never stolen or killed. They couldn't understand why I had been put in prison and condemned to 30 years forced labor, why I had spent 575 days in prison and been tortured. So I explained to them that Mr. Sassou did this to break people's spirit, to stay in power, and for purposes of corruption. Because he does not want to open up the Congolese market to third-party companies. The exception is Chinese companies, with whom, with China, he participates in corruption. It's not just Congo; that's the case in Africa in general. And every time a politician has a different vision, Mr. Sassou Nguesso throws him in prison to discourage anyone who would invite the experience and expertise of the United States. That's what happened to me. That's why I've come, to explain. By the way, I was very happy about one particular instance--it's just one example--when Congressman David Price said, "Oh, you know, I've heard so many promises in Africa, but the United States has never truly had a partner in Africa." And I said to him, "You have your partner." And he was pleased. We expressed our appreciation for each other, it was wonderful. Also, when I went to other departments that deal with human rights issues, they were very aware: they asked me to send them a list of all the political prisoners so the United States could exert pressure on Mr. Sassou to free these dissenting political prisoners--I mean, once again, these people have never killed or stolen. All they did was to ask for a national unity government. They were convicted because they carried signs that said "Administration step down for national unity." That was the first time. Personally, I have always worked for national unity, and funnily enough, that was what led to my conviction. I was not convicted because I asked for our national wealth to be managed the way it is in the States, where each state is independent and there's a central government. I did suggest that each region should be financially and administratively autonomous. But that's not why I was convicted. I was convicted because I asked for national unity in order to prevent Congo from being thrown into a political tailspin and endless debt. And the advantage, the reason why the International Conference and congressional hearing are important, is that we will find out why a country like Congo, which has a population of five million, is indebted to the tune of over 236% of its GDP. There was meant to be a report from the IMF soon. It was cancelled simply because of the dictator Sassou, the criminal Sassou, or as we called him here back when Bill Clinton was president, the warlord Sassou. He is still a warlord: he signs agreements but keeps bombing the people. What he does is exactly like what's being done in Syria. The International Conference and congressional hearing would be a positive step, because we would find out where the money is going, and why China has Congo under its thumb. As things stand, it's not Congo, it's not the Congolese people who control their country. It's China, via false contracts, that controls oil and razes forests for mining. That's why, with the help of the International Conference and early presidential elections, I want to open

Congo up to the expertise and experience of American companies, who are not corrupt. Chinese companies are. That's that kind of expertise I came to find.

[21:05-21:13]

Question 6:

What is next in your efforts to help the Republic of Congo and its people?

[21:13-23:42]

Modeste Boukadia:

What I'm going to do next, tomorrow, is to meet with the North American diaspora, both from Canada and here. I'll give them a summary of what I've been doing. The diaspora is enormous here. They left because it was not safe in Congo. But with the International Conference and congressional hearing, we will put a stop to the illegal immigration that's going on, and at the same time, Congolese talents currently living here will be able to go back and rebuild their country. Then, in France, I'm also going to gather opposition members, people with various opinions, to update them on what's been happening. And I think that by then what I have officially asked the State Department for--the International Conference and congressional hearing--will take place so that Congo will once again be on the path to democracy. And above all, while combating the dictator Sassou through diplomatic means, the United States, which is the major contributor to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, must put the pressure on and take action by boycotting oil products. Because these oil products are what allow China to give money to Sassou, and this money is in turn what allows Sassou to corrupt most politicians and so-called opponents, who are actually his friends. He calls them opponents just so the international community can say there is opposition in Congo. The real opposition is in prison. The ones walking around are not real opponents. That is why I am raising awareness and why I want to go to European and, certainly, African countries, to communicate a positive message.

Conclusion:

Thank you for shedding light on the situation.

Modeste Boukadia:

Thank you for giving me this opportunity, and once again, I'd like to give my warm thanks to the American people and the Trump administration. Thank you very much.