



DRC: CENI and the Red Cross

Social Media Monitoring

27 July 2022

An ambiguous newspaper headline posted on Facebook and the ensuing misinterpretation and public reaction on social media exposes risks of further politicisation of humanitarian missions in the DRC at a time when the country is gearing up for general elections.

On 6 July 2022, a Red Cross vehicle was ambushed and attacked by unidentified armed men at Kapiola village, next to Tshikapa city in Kasai province.

On the same day, Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) agents were attacked in a nearby location and their equipment stolen.



A major local newspaper reported these incidents with a headline that seemed to link the two events: *“Kasai: armed men hold up a Red Cross jeep and take equipment from CENI agents close to Tshikapa”*. Posted on Facebook, the social media post reached an estimated 44.6k people, out of which 285 people actively reacted to it.

Mis-and disinformation

The full article makes no claim that the two incidents were directly linked. It lists several security incidents, including a criminal one, and quotes a Red Cross spokesperson in the paragraph about the attack on the Red Cross vehicle.

On social media, readers skimming only the title interpreted the headline as suggesting that the CENI equipment was being transported in the Red Cross vehicle. Most social media reactions, which often took the form of questions, jumped to the mistaken conclusion that the Red Cross and the CENI were working together.

As the misinformed content was shared, whether inadvertently or deliberately, and further commented upon, it also triggered expressions of mistrust against the Red Cross and INGOs in general and alleged connections to ‘international institutions’ and foreign interests. While most reactions focused on questioning the impartiality and functioning of the electoral institution, others targeted the Red Cross, suggesting that the Red Cross is an instrument in Congolese politics.



Posts

“Since when is CENI material transported in a Red Cross vehicle? A people which destroys itself, this is serious!!!”

“A grave abuse, how is CENI material in a Red Cross bus?”

“This time these international NGOs must be controlled without exceptions, we know well the enemy of the Congolese!”

“Since when are CENI material transported by vehicles belonging to international institutions directed and manipulated by an English state [which is] our enemy”

Conclusions

The way this security incident was discussed on social media highlights the challenges in navigating a complex and fractured political and security landscape where rumours and negative associations can spread quickly online.

As the country heads for elections, scheduled for 2023, the risks that aid agencies are associated with competing political interests are likely to grow.

Recommendations for aid agencies

- Maintain a **high situational awareness** about the topics of discussion in the approaching elections.
- Communicate your **neutrality, impartiality and independence** clearly, regularly and proactively.
- Consider communication about humanitarian principles in **local and easily accessible language**.
- **Train staff** to be effective ambassadors about your humanitarian neutrality.
- Be aware of any optics that could be interpreted as **political positioning**.
- Monitor mainstream and social media to **identify misleading information** that can turn into disinformation and hate speech.
- Develop a **response plan** in case of misleading information and misinformed social media discussions.

 Insecurity Insight is monitoring discussions on social media about aid related security incidents. Please [get in touch](#) if you have any specific incidents, you would like investigated.

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